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A ROMANCE
OF
AMERICAN SOCIETY

“ It is a high merit with Mrs. Moore that she seeks her subjects in every-day life, instead of dealing in the visionary regions of inflated romance. * * * * *

It would be difficult, perhaps impossible, for a man to anatomize the female heart as she has done. * * * Her success is the more distinguished because authorship with her is an amusement and not a profession. * * * *

We trust that she will eventually find time for the composition of some more elaborate fiction than the short fugitive stories with which she has hitherto graced our literature; and with her wide observation of the female heart, and her skill in managing incidents, she cannot but succeed if she makes the attempt. Most of her writings have been published under the *nom de plume* of Clara Moreton.”—*From “Hart’s Female Prose Writers of America.”*

ON

DANGEROUS GROUND;

OR,

AGATHA'S FRIENDSHIP.

A Romance of American Society.

BY

MRS. BLOOMFIELD H. MOORE.

Clara Sophia (Jessup) Bloomfield - N

"It is from the great book of Nature, the same through a thousand editions, whether of black-letter or wire-wove and hot-pressed, that I have venturously essayed to read a chapter to the public."



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PART I.

‘ You have no sin, nor any conception of what it is ; and therefore you are so terribly severe ! As a saint you are not amiss ; but as a human creature, and a woman among earthly men and women, you need a sin to soften you.’

HAWTHORNE.

CHAPTER I.

IT had been the desire of Agatha's life to have a Platonic friendship. She did not enjoy flirting; all lovers she declared were bores, and now she was fast verging towards the sisterhood of spinsters without having formed that friendship in which she felt herself capable of sustaining her part; for all her friends had a proclivity for turning into lovers.

More than once had she fancied that she had found her ideal, but each time scarcely had she given herself up to the full enjoyment of the companionship before the friendship straightway flamed up into love and left her nothing but ashes. Not that Agatha had any objections to marrying, provided she was found by the one whom Heaven had ordained for her; but until the gods should send to her her mate, she ardently longed for the intense devoted friendship of a man.

Agatha was no beauty, but there was so much soul in her face, that many found her wonderfully attractive. She had a clear dead-white skin, soft brown eyes; a straight, well cut nose, and full lips, as red as barberries. When she loosened the bands of her abundant hair it fell in dark waves to her knees, rippling over her white forehead in the short tresses that we see in portraits painted nearly a century ago. She had a weakness for copying portions of the dress as in these same portraits,

and often wore soft frills around her throat and wrists, which gave her a quaint look, although they were excessively becoming.

In her manners she was perfectly natural, as free from vanity as affectation, and so independent and given to a free expression of her thoughts and feelings, that neither her relatives nor her teachers had ever been able to school her into the reticence which they considered desirable. Her original ideas, and her outspoken utterance of them, had occasioned her father a great deal of anxiety concerning her when she was but a child in years (her mother had died when she was an infant); but as she developed into womanhood she had glided into those grooves of society, the restraints of which she had rebelled against when younger, and accepted as a fact that such grooves were necessary to its maintenance in order and propriety.

Charming as was their city home in New York, their seaside villa at Newport possessed for Agatha many more attractions. At this villa were gathered one autumn month of a year which shall be nameless, as blithe a party as its walls had ever held. So merrily had passed the days in excursions of various kinds, in riding and driving and boating, in games on the lawn, when the weather was fine; and within doors, when the skies were lowering, or the rain came down. So charmingly had the evenings flown on wings of song or dance, and the endless flow of conversation with which the young are gifted, that when the last evening came, the group was anything but a merry one that, clad in warm wrappings of various kinds, gathered on the broad piazza to enjoy the unusual mildness of the moonlight night. They were

all under the shadow of the near separation ; and when a walk upon the cliffs was proposed, it was a relief to Agatha to see them stroll off together, falling into pairs as accident or inclination led ; while she, pleading some excuse for not accompanying them, sat down when they were out of sight in a corner of the piazza which commanded a view of the ocean, entirely unconscious that she was not quite alone, until the sound of voices reached her from another corner, just where the shadows fell the darkest. She had scarcely made this discovery before another figure appeared in sight, that of a man, who, avoiding the winding gravelled walk, struck a path across the lawn, and greeting her with some familiarity as he approached, drew up another chair, and sat down beside her. He was their nearest neighbour, Colonel Potten ; a widower whom Agatha had once liked, but fancying that his frequent visits of late were made with matrimonial speculations, she felt her heart hardening towards him. As he sat now, caressing his raven black moustache with a hand as soft and white as a woman's, not so deeply engrossed in conversation as to prevent a furtive glance cast down now and then upon its whiteness, Agatha felt sure that in his own estimation he was irresistible and resolved that she would show him he was not.

‘ I hear that your guests all leave in the morning,’ he said.

‘ Yes, they all leave in the morning,’ she answered coldly.

‘ You will be quite lonely I fear—hope, I should say, as then I could claim the neighbourly privilege of dropping in often to look after you.’ Her face was in shadow,

or the cold look in her eyes would have deterred him from taking the sentimental attitude he now assumed, leaning towards her, as he continued,

‘I hope my visits are not unwelcome.’

‘Other guests arrive the day after,’ said Agatha, not noticing his last remark.

Colonel Potten twisted his moustache, as he had a trick of doing whenever he was annoyed. ‘Is it possible? I knew that you were to remain until Christmas, but I thought it was too late in the season to tempt anyone from the town to the country. Why, November will soon be here.’

‘Possibly, our guests are coming to us more for the sake of companionship, than from any advantages which the country possesses,’ she replied.

‘I daresay,’ answered the Colonel, chewing at his moustache.

‘Although, for my part,’ continued Agatha, ‘I think November the most charming month of autumn, with its delicious Indian summer days, and its cheery evenings, when one enjoys so thoroughly the blazing warmth of the open fires through the house.’

‘I daresay,’ answered the Colonel, utterly unconscious that he was echoing his last words.

At this moment, Agatha’s attention became riveted upon the two in the dark corner; not dark enough, however, to prevent her from perceiving how intense was the flirtation that was being carried on. More than once, Agatha had seen the man press passionately to his lips the long yellow curls of hair that streamed down from under one side of the burnous which enveloped the head of his companion.

‘What an idiot!’ she exclaimed.

‘Which is the idiot?’ asked Colonel Potten, glancing at the two in the corner.

‘Any man who kisses a woman’s hair in these days of chignons is an idiot,’ answered Agatha. ‘Do you know who they are?’

‘I think the man is your cousin : Frank Mortimer.’

‘Is Frank so silly? Of course he is making love to the little Hunter. They are well matched for a flirtation.’

‘You have not your usual discernment to-night, Miss Lee. Those blonde tresses are from no chignon, but the veritable property of Mrs. Arthur Grey.’

‘Good heavens! I had no idea—really, I thought better of both of them,’ ejaculated Agatha, confused and agitated. She wished that she had not drawn Colonel Potten’s attention to them. ‘How could I dream the woman was married?’ she asked herself,

‘Your shocked expression is quite refreshing. I had no idea that you were so behind the times,’ said Colonel Potten.

Agatha replied in her most freezing tones,

‘I hope I shall always be behind the times, if being shocked by my cousin’s impertinence and want of principle in making love to a married woman is an index of it. But of course Mrs. Grey is not to blame for his nonsense. You observe that her face is turned in such a way that she cannot see what an idiot he is making of himself.’

‘Oh! of course not,’ answered the Colonel, but the low, derisive laugh that followed, denied the assent which he had given; and Agatha annoyed by it, would have annihilated him if a look could have done it.

‘Men are always unjust to women,’ she said, ‘always

ready to put the very worst construction upon what they see.'

'As much so, do you think, as women are upon each other?' he asked, with provoking coolness. 'I think women are far more unjust to each other than men are to them; and I believe my opinion coincides with that of the world in general. Was it Abraham or Sarah who sent the forlorn Hagar into the desert with her child?'

'Your parallel cases, Colonel Potten, remind me of the lines,

If the man who turnips cries
Cries not when his father dies,
'Tis a proof that he would rather
Have a turnip than his father.

'I am glad to learn that I remind you of anything so amusing. I would prefer to be thought of by you in such connection even, than not to be thought of at all;' replied Colonel Potten gallantly, but he pulled at his moustache, nevertheless, as though he did not quite relish the association.

Without deigning any remark to this last observation, Agatha returned to her first proposition.

'Yes, from Adam down to the present time men are all unjust to women. It is their rightful inheritance I daresay, with original sin, "total depravity," and all the other birthrights common to human nature. One thing is encouraging however, for, notwithstanding all they have had to contend with, the man of to-day is a most decided improvement upon Adam. Do you not agree with me?'

'Not having had the pleasure of a personal acquaintance with that estimable individual, and biblical history being so very concise in his biography, I am not able to

form an opinion,' answered the Colonel, in his most complacent tones. ' Still, if you refer to any quality of the mind, such as bravery, for instance, I do think that with the Eve of my choice to cherish and protect, I would have made a stand in Paradise with her if I had died for it.'

The Colonel had fought with some distinction in the war between the North and the South.

' Who would have dreamed of finding a second Lucifer in our brave Colonel!' exclaimed Agatha.

' I think it would be enough to make a demon of any man to turn him adrift homeless with such a divine piece of flesh and blood as Doré represents Eve to have been, and all for a miserable apple.'

' But the fruit was forbidden.'

' Which made it all the more desirable.'

' So long as one is left free to choose, one ought not to shirk the penalty if one makes choice of the road of self-gratification instead of self-denial,' answered Agatha. ' It is only the child who cries for the cake and the penny, too,' she continued. ' For my part I never could get up any indignation against either Adam or Eve for tasting the fruit, although it was forbidden, but I was always incensed at his outrageous want of manliness in saying, "The woman tempted me, and I did eat." Why, there is not a schoolboy in his teens at the present day who would have told of his chum, to say nothing if the apple had been given him by a little girl and that is why I say that the men of the present day are an improvement upon Adam.'

' Very true,' laughed the Colonel. ' I wonder I never saw it in that light before. It rather shakes my faith in Adam. A man who would be so dishonourable as to

tell would have been none too good to have invented the story. Perhaps, after all, Eve never made the suggestion to him.'

'That has always been my theory,' replied Agatha.

At this instant she made an exclamation, which caused Colonel Potten to ask her if she had seen a ghost. She did indeed look startled, sitting as if struck dumb, her eyes fixed upon the two in the corner. Her sudden ejaculation seemed also to have startled them, for they arose and approached her.

'May I inquire what has been the subject of this animated discussion?' said Mortimer.

'Is that a fair question?' asked Colonel Potten.

'The question is fair enough. It remains to be seen whether the answer will be equally fair.'

'We have not been confining ourselves to one topic,' replied the Colonel. The last matter under discussion was whether "the man who kisses and tells" is worthy of credence. Your cousin thinks he would be none too good to make up the story if he told it. Now, in return, allow me to ask what topic has so absorbed you in your secluded corner?'

Agatha longed to add, 'that you have been so regardless of the moonlight, of us, and of appearances;' but she said nothing. Mrs. Grey shook back her long blonde curls, and answered with an air of bewitching artlessness,

'I am afraid you would not believe us if we told you. Come, Mr. Mortimer, I feel like taking a stroll on the cliffs in the moonlight. What do you say?'

Mr. Mortimer seemed to have lost his usual readiness of repartee, for he only answered, 'With pleasure' as they walked off together.

‘The woman is always the readier in an emergency,’ said Colonel Potten, ‘but when your cousin is ten years older he will wear his honours more unblushingly.’

‘His disgraces, you mean,’ answered Agatha, throwing into her voice the scorn that she felt. ‘Did you ever see such a woman? but I am quite forgetting that she is my father’s guest.’

‘Did I ever see such a woman? Scores of them. You must be quite a child, Miss Lee. This is what the German School of Novels is developing in society. Either under the name of “Platonic friendship,” “affinities,” or “free-love”—it is all the same—this is what it ends in.’

‘No! no!’ exclaimed Agatha, ‘do not abuse Platonic friendship to me. I am a firm believer in it. Men always confuse it with love. Mrs. Grey’s conduct does not shake my firm faith in Platonic friendship any more than a piece of spurious coin palmed off upon me would take away my faith in the existence of sterling gold. She is always talking of her friendships, I know; but such a woman is incapable of true friendship. As for “free-love,” that is too revolting to find advocates among people of any refinement; but you must believe in affinities, Colonel Potten.’ Agatha had spoken with earnestness, and in equally earnest tones Colonel Potten replied,

‘I believe in the devil.’

‘What do you mean? What connection can there be between the two that you should so associate them?’ asked Agatha.

‘Why simply this, that there is more or less of the devil in all affinities.’

‘Shall I never meet a man who thinks as I do?’ said Agatha vehemently.

‘Would to God I were that one,’ replied the Colonel, and now there was deep feeling in his tones. ‘More than ever do I wish that I were worthy of the hope which has been kindled in my heart. I will not venture to disclose to you what that hope is; but promise me that there may be a “peradventure” in the future that you will at least listen to it.’

All Agatha’s coolness and self-possession returned to her. In the most matter-of-fact way she answered,

‘If you propose to make love to me, Colonel Potten, it is much better for me to tell you at once that we can never sustain any nearer relations than those that exist between us now. The man whom I marry must be one towards whom I feel my soul going out unmistakeably the first time I meet him. I am a believer in love at first sight.’

Colonel Potten could hardly repress the contemptuous exclamation that rose to his lips, but finally answered,

‘I thought you had more common sense, Miss Lee.’

Agatha, regardless of this remark, continued,

‘Such a man I have never met; and should I never meet such a one, I shall never marry. It is much better to remain single than to wed one in whom does not exist both congeniality of mind and affinity of temperament.’

Colonel Potten arose to take his departure, saying as he drew on the glove of his left hand,

‘You have my best wishes for your future happiness, Miss Lee; but I think you are in error. Some of the happiest marriages I have known have been between

persons who have either contrasts in temperament, or in mind ; and with me it is a question whether it is not an essential of a perfect marriage that this contrast should exist. Good-night. Will you not give me your hand in parting ? It may be long before we meet again.'

Agatha suffered her fingers to receive the soft pressure of Colonel Potten's ungloved hand, but she could not repress the chill of aversion that she felt at the contact. He knew that it was so ; and, as he walked away, he renounced that hope of one day winning her which had been inspired in his heart by his full appreciation of her worth.

Agatha had been from childhood peculiarly susceptible to that animal magnetic influence which caused her to betray in her face, in the tones of her voice even, either pleasure or indifference in her intercourse with others. She could not fraternise with those who were not congenial ; she could not devote herself too assiduously to those who were. Her face was as a book, unfortunately, whereon all could read the emotions with which they inspired her ; and too frequently the thoughts of her heart found utterance in words. Talleyrand's maxim had no meaning for her—'Language was given to us to disguise our thoughts.'

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Colonel Potten crossed the lawn, and passed the turnstile that led into his own property, he had fully resolved to leave Newport at once ; but ‘man proposes, and God disposes.’ For more than an hour he walked the winding gravelled path that bordered the cliffs which commanded a view not only of the bay, whose gently heaving surface broke with caressing murmurs against the rocks below, but of the mighty ocean beyond, where, near the horizon, scattered white sails were dimly seen, gliding like ghosts into eternity.

‘I was mad ! I was a fool !’ he said to himself, ‘to have risked all so soon, without one word, one look of encouragement even ! What possessed me ? At my age one expects to be done with that boyish romance of heart which sends a man rushing headlong into a declaration before he has made sure of success.’ He glanced up at the moon, which in turn looked down upon him, as he fancied in mockery, from the masses of vaporous clouds that were careering across her path. ‘You have the face of a devil to-night,’ he continued, looking straight at the peering moon as if he were looking into the face of a human being. ‘Yes, the face of a devil, I say. It was your cursed witchery that led me into this folly !—this lunacy of making love to a woman who scorns love and laughs at lovers ! Before God, I hope her turn may come !’

Still pacing the path that bordered his grounds, but now with his head bent downwards, he communed in silence with his thoughts, arranging and rearranging his plans for departure. At last he quickened his steps and walked across the sward to his house; entering his library by a window that opened out on the piazza, where his favourite dog kept guard, and who made one or two unsuccessful attempts to attract some token of recognition. The sagacious animal, having more sense than some bipeds, saw his master was in no mood for the bestowal of favours, and turned back in a dejected manner to his place of repose.

The night was one of those warm, still nights, that rarely come so late in the season. Not a breath stirred the drooping vines that clustered around the columns of the veranda; not a sound but the murmur of 'the ever-murmuring sea,' and the chirp of crickets on the lawn, broke upon the silence. Colonel Potten sat down in his easy chair, and leaning his head on one hand looked vacantly before him; but his attention was arrested by a solitary sealed letter that his eyes fell upon, lying on the library table. He recognised the clear bold writing at a glance, and a look half of pleasure, half of annoyance, settled upon his handsome face as he took it up and broke the seal.

'Bah!' he ejaculated. 'It is strange that a man who is not a fool should use a crest in this country! How they must laugh at us over the seas for our cursed imitations of their weaknesses!' Then regarding the crest more attentively as it clung in its shattered state to the envelope, he saw the motto, which, translated, read: 'The brave can die, but never yield;' he added, musingly, 'After all, we who carry scars from such battles as Howard and I have fought side by side in,

have a better right to use such symbols, if we have a taste that way, than have many of the descendants of those old Norman plunderers.' He broke the seal, and read,

'DEAR HORACE,—' You will think me as changeable as a woman. I have this moment decided to accept the invitation that I refused, and you may expect me by boat to-morrow, or the day after. My head still troubles me, and Panchose has ordered me entire rest of body and mind. The idea is truly refreshing, to say nothing of what the reality will be to a poor devil who has never been allowed to have either.

'Yours faithfully,

'PAUL HOWARD.'

Colonel Potten's eyebrows contracted in a frown.

'Just as I expected. Now, I am chained here for another month. What imp of darkness ever prompted him to accept my invitation, after once having refused it on the ground of the dulness of a watering-place when the season is over, and the ninety-and-nine invitations that he stood committed to accept at country seats on the Hudson, Staten Island, and elsewhere, before the season commences in town? I'll be bound there's some woman in the case.'

One little word in the corner had escaped his notice. 'Over.' His eye at last rested upon it, and he turned the leaf. 'P.S.—I have learned a new song, and by Jove, when I sing it, I feel in love with myself. I fancy it renders me irresistible. "She is mine! she is mine!" I tell you, Horatius, if I had known that song, and had sung it to you the night before we cut our way through

the rebel ranks in "the wilderness," we would have fought like gods that day ! As it was we fought like incarnate demons, did we not, old fellow ? No, we did what was better, we fought like men, for do you not remember how when the sun went down we both emptied our flasks at the mouths of the poor wretches who had stood up against us when that same sun was high in the heavens. You brought me good help that day, my comrade, when my horse was shot under me, and that cursed Minie ball gave me my ugly wound. I want your help now, in another direction. "All is fair in love and in war," you know. My secret will keep until I see you ; in the meantime, commend me to sweet "Saint Agatha," in the way of a kind word or two in behalf of your tried friend and faithful comrade of the field ; also to all other saints in your neighbourhood. You see I know something of your surroundings ; my familiar keeps me advised, though seas divide and oceans roll between.'

'The devil helps his own,' was all that Colonel Potten said, as he walked to the bell-rope, and after ordering the servant who answered it, to close the house for the night, went to his chamber. Meantime, how fared it with Agatha ? Did not the first ray of pity enter her heart to soften it towards the man who had paid her the highest compliment that it is in the power of man to pay a woman ? If so, she did not betray it in any way. When her guests returned to the house, two by two, after their moonlight walks, Agatha received them with a face as serene as the moonlight itself that streamed in through the bay window of the library, where she had half buried herself in the luxurious depths of a lounging chair. Only once was her composure disturbed ; it

was when Mrs. Grey came in leaning heavily upon Frank Mortimer's arm, and approaching her, said,

'It is agonising to think this is the last night. Oh, Miss Lee, I never expect to be as happy again this side of heaven.'

'Are you sure you will go to heaven?' asked Agatha, looking up straight into the blue seductive eyes that were bent over her.

'I daresay if I had my deserts I never should get beyond the gates; but then who would?' she replied, with her usual *aplomb*.

Some eager words trembled upon Agatha's lips, but, remembering her duty as a hostess, she withheld them.

Mrs. Grey, looking archly back, after saying 'good-night,' added,

'I thought you would answer that those who have charity for others might possibly get within those same gates, for charity, we are told, covers a multitude of sins. Again, "good-night." ' Agatha arose, and gathered up her wrappings.

'What is the meaning of all this?' said Mortimer. 'You cannot instruct my fair cousin in any biblical matters. She knows every passage by heart, I believe, for she brings them out like bomb-shells when she sits in judgment upon my peccadilloes. "Saint Agatha" we call her sometimes.'

They passed out laughing together, took leave of each other at the foot of the staircase, and in another hour the house was wrapped in darkness and in silence.

But Agatha could not sleep. After vainly striving to compose herself, she arose, and wrapping her dressing gown around her, sat down at the window. How beautiful the night was! how glorious! The loveliness of

earth, ocean, and sky was intensified by the bewitching moonlight. Agatha was conscious of all this beauty though her eyes were cast upwards, as one who sees nothing. Her rippling hair fell over her shoulders and wrapped her as in a purple cloud ; and in the clouds she was to all intents and purposes.

‘How lovely it must be in heaven !’ thought Agatha, ‘although this world would be quite beautiful enough for me, if I did not feel so fearfully lonely at times. Here am I, twenty-five years old, and as the world goes I have had what everyone calls a happy life ; yet, I hope I shall not live to be an old woman. I wonder old people are always so anxious to live. What with folly, and evil temper in one’s self, or others, and even worse things to contend with, I do not think life is so very desirable. Two or three more years, and I daresay people will begin to call me an old maid ; I feel a presentiment settling down upon me that I am to be one. Not that it would be such an unendurable fate to contemplate, if I could only come across that friend I am always looking for. I would like above all things to have such a friendship as I have dreamed of—such as I have often read about. I wonder if I ever will realise this desire of my heart ?’

So musing, Agatha’s eyes closed, and she went off into the land of dreams. Here she found herself walking hand in hand with a man of noble bearing. Her feet were bare, but she did not feel abashed ; not even so much as a grain of dust clung to them. How carefully he guided her steps, how solicitous he was that she should not fatigue herself ; and when they paused to rest by the wayside, how tenderly he held both her hands in his ! and looking up into his eyes, what revelations of

truth and goodness, and pure affection, she read in them ! Again, they were hurrying on in the midst of crowds, and Agatha saw that all eyes were turned to her feet ; but still they were white and spotless. At last they came to a piece of road where the mud was thick, and little slimy pools of water lay here and there. Agatha paused, hesitated, and shrank back. How could she step into that oozing soil ? But the clasp of the cool, firm hand gave her strength, and drew her onwards : she glanced down at her feet, expecting to see the noisome mire clinging to them at last ; but no, she had already passed through clean and unstained, and now she had reached the mossy hills beyond, which she could see stretching up and up, ever in higher peaks until they seemed to touch the holy stars. Here, her companion, holding her head for one moment between his hands, just touched her forehead with his lips, and disappeared. She called after the vision, and awoke with her arms stretched out imploringly.

The dream seemed so real to Agatha, that for days those serene eyes haunted her, while to her heart came such longings for love as she had never known before.

CHAPTER III.

AT the breakfast-table the following morning there was no end of *bardinage* in reference to one thing and another. The different series of guests that had been entertained during the summer and autumn months at Mr. Lee's villa afforded a subject for conjecture.

‘The first must have been “the necessary people,”’ remarked Mrs. Grey, ‘the relatives, and connections, and all that could not be left out, you understand, like the members of the diplomatic corps at courts, who have to be invited, no matter how disagreeable and tiresome they are. Then must have been “the elegants,” who used always to come in at Compiègne between “the necessary people” and “the bores;” and now, we in turn make way for “the bores.” Is it not so?’ and she turned her pretty head on one side, until her long curls brushed the hand of the man who had kissed them so rapturously the night before.

He glanced furtively across the table at Agatha, and catching her eye, said, ‘By the way, who are to be your next guests?’

‘A very dear old friend of mine, and some acquaintances of papa’s,’ she answered.

‘Ah !’ he replied, feigning a very wise look, ‘there is a secret it seems. Some rejected suitor perhaps, who is coming here to console himself with Platonic friendship ;’ then turning to a gentleman who sat near

him, he said, 'That is my cousin's hobby ; and, would you believe it, she has never yet come across a man who was wise enough to accept the Platonic part and trust to luck or himself for the chance of winning more.'

Agatha looked like anything but a saint as the laugh went round the table.

'But won't you tell us who is coming, or is it really a secret ?' asked Miss Hunter, a charming brunette of twenty summers who sat on Mr. Mortimer's left.

'Certainly, but I doubt whether you know any of them,' replied Agatha. 'Papa's friends, General and Mrs. Wheelock ; they——'

'I will count them in order,' interrupted her cousin ; 'they are one.'

'No, they are decidedly two,' called out Mr. Lee, from his seat at the opposite end of the table. 'But, Agatha, you need not include them, for I have just received a letter from the General to say that he finds it impossible to get off from his duties at Washington. It never rains but it pours, you know, and here is another letter from Macalpine, who writes that he and Hastings have decided to go out to Omaha on a shooting excursion, urging me to join them.'

'Is it not lovely ? Now Miss Lee will have to ask four of us to take their places,' said Mrs. Barlow, a handsome young widow who was seated next to Mr. Lee.

'Oh ! dear, adorable Miss Lee, please include me,' cried out Mrs. Grey, while each in turn protested that he or she must be one of the favoured ones.

'You do me too much honour,' said Agatha, smiling around upon her guests. 'You see it is quite out of my power to select any, when by doing so I should offend the others. If my father is disappointed, I regret ex-

tremely the circumstances that have deprived us of the visit of his friends; but I shall not find it difficult to receive consolation for their absence in the society of my old school-mate and best friend, Mrs. Carroll Tracey, who has promised me the whole month of November.'

'You were always very fond of Millie,' said Mrs. Barlow, with a shrug of her shoulders; which seemed to say that *she* was not. 'I hope you like her husband as well, but I think him detestable with his formal freezing ways.'

'Tracey detestable!' exclaimed Mr. Lee. 'Why, he is *distingué jusqu'au bout des ongles*.'

'Ah, Lucy, you and Mildred were never congenial, but I thought every one liked her husband,' added Agatha.

'You thought wrong, my dear; everyone does not like Carroll Tracey. There is no love lost between him and his wife even. Such a capricious, uncertain mortal as she is, could keep no heart true to her: unless one like your own, which has the idealizing power of making your friends just what you wish them to be.'

Frank Mortimer lifted his eyebrows, as much as to say, 'That has not been my experience with my cousin —she never idealizes me;' then, turning to Mr. Davenport, a man with an English face and heavy auburn beard, English cut and cultivated, asked,

'Do you know this lovely creature about whom sentiments are so divided? my cousin pronouncing her her best friend, and Mrs. Barlow declaring her to be incapable either of love or friendship.'

'I did not exactly say that,' said Mrs. Barlow.

Mr. Davenport rejoined, 'Know Mrs. Carroll Tracey! I should think I did. The Traceys have spent two winters in Philadelphia.'

‘I have never seen that wonderful city,’ replied Mortimer; ‘but if I lead a good moral life I hope to go there when I die.’

‘For shame, Mr. Mortimer, that is not original. I have heard it before,’ said Mrs. Grey.

‘You had better go there while you live, if you want to have a good time on earth,’ continued Mr. Davenport, ‘for I know no city where there are so many pretty women. As for Mrs. Tracey, she is only one of a score whom it is a sin to allow to go around loose, turning the heads of half the men they meet. But you know she has gone back to New York to live.’

‘Hah!’ laughed Mortimer, ‘if straws show which way the wind blows, you must have been badly hit.’

‘I acknowledge it,’ replied Davenport. ‘I never expect to get over it. You see there is no hope nor no chance for a man of my prosaic, matter-of-fact ways with a woman like Mrs. Tracey, all heart and feeling and impulse: besides, Mrs. Barlow to the contrary, I assert that she has no eyes for any man but her husband.’

Mrs. Barlow, who had been looking very complacent since Mr. Davenport’s encomiums upon Philadelphia women, she being one, was just upon the point of replying, when Mrs. Dexter, the lady on the right of Mr. Lee, exclaimed,

‘It is charming even to hear of such a woman in these days,’ glancing, as she spoke, down the table at her young and volatile relative, Mrs. Grey, who, during Frank Mortimer’s occasional absences to New York, had monopolised the attentions of the rather heavy looking individual, whom, by virtue of the marriage tie, Mrs. Dexter looked upon as so especially her property that she was

extremely averse to sharing his attentions with her best friends even.'

'It is just as I tell you,' continued Mr. Davenport. 'She has been married five or six years, during which time no one has ever heard any man's name coupled with hers, even in a harmless flirtation.'

'How about Harold Graham?' asked Mrs. Barlow.

'That is an old affair. I believe she jilted him before she married Tracey.'

'Or he jilted her, which was it? I thought there was some talk about them after her marriage.'

'I never heard any. I never heard any man's name mentioned with hers; although I wonder that people have not talked about Paul Howard and herself; for if ever a man tried to compromise a woman, that renegade has tried to compromise her; following her about wherever she goes in the summer time; and now that the Traceys have gone back to New York I daresay he will be more devoted to her than ever.'

'This is getting intensely interesting,' said Mortimer. 'I wish, Agatha, you would make a point of my remaining. The only feature in my favour is that they have left "the city of brotherly love" and pitched their tent in "Sodom" it seems. Before the winter is over, I am bound to know her. What business is her husband in? or is he one of those lucky dogs whose fathers or grandfathers cut business, and left an inheritance that rendered business unnecessary to those who came after them?'

'He is just one of that sort,' answered Mr. Davenport. 'He is a Boston man—has literary tastes, and writes books, or translates them; which is all the same thing, all trash and transcendentalism. I have been

told he gets quite a good income by it. It is said that he neglects his wife—most literary men do, I believe—at all events, he writes half of the year, and the other half he is off shooting or yachting. Quite enough to justify his wife in getting a divorce, I should say.'

'Perhaps she does not wish for one,' suggested Mrs. Grey, who had been pouting over Mr. Mortimer's evident interest in the stranger; but he was utterly regardless, and said again to Agatha, 'Won't you take compassion on me, and ask me for another month. I am so much interested in this paragon, that I want to have an opportunity of judging for myself. Why, it is really more marvellous than any fiction I ever read. A ravishingly lovely young wife, who is so much in love with her husband that she cannot console herself in the remotest degree by the attentions of the men who plunge over head and ears in love with her, without the slightest encouragement! I consider it a settled thing, Agatha, that I am to stay.'

Before Agatha had time to answer, Mrs. Grey broke in, 'Now do be amiable, and ask both of us, Miss Lee. I will promise to devote myself to the Blue-Beard; and Mr. Mortimer will make an impression upon "the paragon;" and you will have your reward in the quantity of anthracite you save; for you may rest assured, all Newport could not furnish coal enough to keep your house at a temperature in which human life could be sustained with two such icebergs within its walls as you and he must be.'

'Were you ever on the Grimsel—in Switzerland?' asked Agatha.

'Yes; but why do you ask?'

I thought that possibly you had never seen the

myriads of flowers that bloom near the glacier of the Rhone, side by side with fields of snow—flowers so delicate that they would perish in the fierce heat and glare of a tropical sun.' Agatha looked as merciless as she felt. Mrs. Grey perfectly understood the implied simile, but she answered quite carelessly,

'I never cared for wild flowers as I do for gorgeous exotics and glowing blossoms of tropical plants; but I would never have suspected that you, Miss Lee, could care for flowers at all. Take my advice and repress your fondness, for if you admit into your heart the weakness of loving flowers of any description you may end by loving all. Spring comes in with lilies and snow-drops; but summer brings great deep-hearted roses, that break with their own weight, sometimes.'

Frank Mortimer, entirely unsuspicuous of any hidden meaning in these words, turned to Mrs. Grey,

'You did not suspect my cousin of the weakness of loving flowers? Why, she used to say, before she took vows of celibacy, that when she got married she was going to have hyacinths in her sitting-room, even if she should marry a man who could not afford to have carpets.'

There was such a chattering kept up around the table that Mrs. Grey's low tones in answer fell upon no other ears than those for which they were intended.

'It would seem that the sayings and doings of your cousin Agatha have made a great impression upon you in times past, that you remember them so long. You are always quoting them.'

Frank Mortimer did not stand fire well on that occasion, although more than once he had received honourable mention in the despatches of his General for

his bravery on the field of battle, when, as *aide-de-camp*, he had carried orders through storms of flying shot and exploding shells. A crimson flush mounted to his temples, where blonde, crisp waves of hair clustered thickly, and his eyes fell under the searching glance that he encountered.

‘I assure you we have never been on passably friendly terms even. She is much too good to fraternise even in a cousinly way with a harum-scarum fellow like myself.’

‘There are various kinds of goodness, as well as various degrees of each kind,’ answered Mrs. Grey. ‘I daresay she is one who is so thoroughly imbued with all kinds, that she has no faults of her own to correct, and so has an ambition to make the world better. I wonder whether she has ever had a temptation; because if she has not, I do not believe in her goodness. People who have never known a temptation are always the hardest upon the sins of others. It is quite evident that she looks upon our little flirtation as one of the seven deadly sins. Heavens! I wish she were the wife of an unprincipled, dissipated *roué*, and then fell into the society of a man so congenial as to make her forget that she had a husband!’

‘Do be careful what you say,’ implored Mortimer. ‘There, look at your nice travelling gown, with your coffee streaming over it!’ By a gesture of impatience Mrs. Grey had upset a portion of her coffee as they rose from the table. When one of the servants had repaired the mischief as far as it lay in his power, the carriages had come around, and all were engrossed by preparations for departure. They alone remained in the breakfast-room.

‘It is quite impossible to persuade you to go as far as Boston with us? You could return by the boat from Fall River this evening.’ She had such a pleading expression in her eyes that they said more than the words even.

‘It really is impossible. You have forgotten that it is business that keeps me here. Though only one day longer, I am to be pitied that it is so.’

Still she lingered; her eyes were cast downwards, and her breath came in long, tremulous swells.

‘Do you not pity me?’ he asked, lifting her hand to his lips.

‘Yes, I do pity you, if I divine aright the nature of the business that detains you. You are going to offer yourself to your cousin; and if she accepts you, you will know what the curse of a granted prayer is when one has prayed for something that destiny ought to deny. But she will not accept you. She is as cold as snow—as cold as the glacier she preached to me about to-day.’ Her little, gesturing hand, which she had withdrawn from his clasp, lay soft and dimpled upon his arm as she ceased speaking and with eyes upturned to his, she pleaded, ‘Do not break your own heart against that woman’s heart of marble! ’

He took the soft, warm hand once more and again carried it to his lips, saying, ‘You foolish little woman! I must teach you not to be jealous! Agatha is nothing to me, nor has she ever been! ’

A footfall caused them to turn, when they encountered Agatha’s eyes. A ghost could not have startled them more. How much or how little had she heard?

There were noisy adieus, much chattering, kissing of hands, and waving of handkerchiefs as one by one the carriages rolled away with their occupants.

Mr. Lee and Frank Mortimer followed on saddle horses down to the boat, to see the merry party off on their way to their various destinations.

CHAPTER IV.

THAT day Mr. Lee, Agatha, and Frank Mortimer dined alone. Mr. Lee was still a fine-looking man, although more than fifty years of age, but so scrupulously careful of the cut of his beard, and of his dress, as to cause him to appear much younger.

‘So the bewitching widow did not catch you in her toils, my good uncle,’ said Frank.

‘I must do her the justice to say that if she had spread them, I should most undoubtedly have been caught. I daresay you think I am old enough to have gotten over such follies ; but to this day I cannot have a pretty woman make love to me without making love to her myself.’

‘Matrimonially ?’ asked Frank, looking rather quizzical.

‘Not exactly ; although there is no knowing how it might end if Agatha did not keep me under *surveillance*.’

‘How strange, that having such a susceptible father I am not more susceptible myself,’ said Agatha.

‘It is rather odd. Dexter said last evening I was fortunate in keeping you so long ; but I must remember in the course of nature I would be the first to go, and that I ought to see you settled in life, if for no other reason than that I might leave you without a protector.

He has yet the fancy that it is some quixotic idea about leaving me that prevents you from marrying. Now if that is the case I shall arrange a *mariage de convenance* for you at once. By the way, Frank, have you observed what a watch Dexter's wife keeps over him ?'

'Of course I have. Who has not ? I rather pity that man. He deserves a better fate.'

'I think he can dispense with your pity,' said Agatha. 'He seems quite able to take care of himself ; and although he feels his wife's watchfulness, without doubt he has the good sense not to show it. He resigned himself to Mrs. Grey's devotion when you were away ; and papa can tell you how very devoted she was.'

'But Mrs. Grey is his cousin,' replied her father.

'Cousins are not necessarily devoted,' said Agatha.

'That is quite true,' remarked Frank, with emphatic fervour.

'Agatha and she did not fraternise very well ; I saw that from the first,' said Mr. Lee.

'No, papa, we did not ; and if you knew her better you would be sorry if I did fraternise with her.'

'Don't be too severe upon her,' exclaimed Frank. 'She is not bad *au fond*. I think you were a little hard upon her, Agatha.'

'Not until she conducted herself in a way that convinced me that she was bad at heart ; and how you can say that she was not is more than I can understand.'

Frank always avoided a discussion with his cousin, and he now adroitly changed the conversation by asking her opinion of Mrs. Barlow.

'I thought she had designs upon my father at one time,' she answered.

'And I thought Mrs. Dexter was afraid that she had

designs upon her husband,' said Mr. Lee. ' You, Agatha, ought to sympathise with Mrs. Dexter, for you take as good care of me, evidently, as she does of her husband. What did you think of "the dead set" that the little Hunter made for Davenport?' I think it was a great waste of ammunition. Davenport is not a marrying man: don't you agree with me, Agatha ?'

' I think Mr. Davenport is like many other men—he is not a marrying man because he does not happen to meet any one whom he wishes to marry; when he does, he will be a marrying man, I daresay. I rather like Mr. Davenport myself, but I am quite sure that he does not like me: he is always so *géné* when he is with me.'

' On the contrary, he told me he had the greatest admiration for you, and that when he came across a woman like you, who would have him, he intended to marry,' said Mr. Lee.

Frank burst out into tumultuous laughter. ' Well, that is one way of declaring one's self; just like Davenport. I thought he had some secret grief, for his nose is getting so red, and his eyes so bleared that they suggest hopeless weeping, and all that sort of thing.'

' How hateful in you !' exclaimed Agatha; and yet she joined in the laugh.

Thus, through dinner they chatted about their late guests, now one, and now another; but Frank took care that Mrs. Grey did not again come under discussion. When dinner was ended Mr. Lee strolled off to 'look in upon Potten, and smoke a cigar with him,' as he said; and Agatha, after giving orders for the saddle horses to be brought around later for herself and her cousin, be-

took herself to her chamber, leaving Frank to amuse himself as he chose. He grumbled a little at being turned off so unceremoniously, and then went to the billiard-room to smoke his cigar, pacing up and down as he smoked, quite lost in thought, and a sentence or two occasionally escaping him.

‘I might as well cry for the moon, I dare say.’ Puff, puff—the soft smoke curled in hollow rings upwards as he withdrew his cigar, and permitted it to escape his lips in a peculiar manner, pausing and watching them as they broke and dissolved in the air. ‘Still, she only treats me as she does all the rest—no worse, I think—no better, I am sure.’ Puff, puff, puff—the smoke came out in clouds now, and he walked backwards and forwards without heeding it. ‘She is my first love, my only love; and who knows what is in her heart? It is an encouragement that she looked staggered to-day when she came upon us so suddenly. Perhaps the secret of her indifference to others is some hidden love; and if so, why may I not be the object?’ He paused now in front of the broad mirror that hung against the chimney, and saw there a face that a woman might well have been pardoned for fancying. The violet eyes were luminous with the tenderness of a newly-awakened hope; the full, red lips were struck apart in a smile, disclosing teeth of brilliant whiteness; the well-poised head, the broad shoulders, the Antinous brow, all combined to give Frank Mortimer confidence in his own powers; and his resolution was taken on the spot. ‘I will know to-night what my chances are—to-night. Anything is better than this suspense.’

The horses were led around at the appointed hour, and Agatha came down, looking almost a beauty in her

well-made riding habit. Frank always thought her beautiful ; and as he seated her, he took the opportunity of saying, ‘ My elegant cousin never looks better than when she is in riding costume.’

‘ I wish I could return the compliment,’ answered Agatha ; ‘ but your ideas of a man’s riding costume are so different from mine, that I think you never look worse. You affect English ways so much that I wonder you do not adopt their sensible dress.’

‘ I flattered myself that my get-up was quite English,’ Mortimer replied, glancing down with evident pride at his top-boots.

‘ Some day you will ride in Rotten Row, I daresay, and then you can take observations. I doubt whether you will make yourself look so much like an English groom or a jockey afterwards as you have a fancy for doing now ; but not even a groom would appear mounted with such a thing as you wear on your head.’

‘ A thing ! ’ exclaimed Mortimer. ‘ Why, this is the last mode ; positively the latest novelty out.’

‘ No novelties are admitted in riding dress,’ answered Agatha. ‘ There is only one hat for a man to wear, or a woman either, if they wish to be *comme il faut*. But I am not in the mood for talking ; let us try a gallop.’ They took a long ride, returning after sunset, Agatha’s face glowing from the exhilarating exercise, and seemingly another being, laughing and jesting with her cousin with greater freedom of manner than she had shown towards him for many a long day. He could not account for the change, but gave himself up to the happiness of knowing that it was so. He had adored her from his boyhood, his love increasing with his years, instead of diminishing, notwithstanding her apparent or seeming

indifference. He felt when he was with her that there was no hope for him, and yet he never avoided an opportunity to be in her company. The slightest encouragement from her would at any time within years have brought about a declaration, but she had long ago renounced that familiarity which their cousinly relations entitled him to expect. He was the envy of all his friends, and hated by his rivals, for his successes with women ; but could they have known how indifferent he was to it all, how gladly he would have left to them every one of the wives, widows, and maidens to whom he had made love (or who had made love to him) for the heart of the only woman whom he did covet, they would have compassionated instead of envied him.

Agatha possibly would have been at a loss to explain to herself why she had so suddenly relapsed into her old familiarity, but it was because she thought she had less to fear from him than heretofore in the way of love-making. Her heart, which had been hardened towards him instead of softened by the knowledge of his passion, was no longer on its guard, now that she had made the discovery that he was interested in another. She even accepted his proffered arm, leaning lightly on it, and laughing up into his face, at some light jest which he had uttered, as she crossed the piazza and the hall to the library, where she dropped wearied into her favourite lounging chair in the recess of the window. Her cheeks were no longer marble pale, but flushed to a roseate hue ; and as she laid aside her hat, her wealth of hair broke loose, and flowed around her. The moon had just risen, and threw out from the mass of dark clouds that framed it as if it were some enormous jewel, a flood of bewitching light. It streamed through the window, full

upon her expressive face. Her cousin stood in the shadows, leaning against the mantel with his arms folded, regarding her as some devotee might regard a shrine which was too sacred for him to approach.

‘Have you no conversation?’ she said at last, repeating one of his own frequent phrases.

‘If you were like other women you would appreciate my silence more than any conversation,’ he replied.

‘Indeed! Are you so stupid that women generally like you best when you do not talk?’

‘You do but feign ignorance of my meaning, for you well know Agatha, that the highest form of worship is silent adoration.’

‘You speak in enigmas; pray explain yourself.’

‘I would be only too happy to do so, if I dared.’

‘You may dare anything, after what I overheard this morning, when you parted with Mrs. Potiphar.’

‘Mrs. who?’ he asked.

‘Mrs. Potiphar Grey; at least, that is what her name ought to be. I look upon that woman with horror, and I wish papa had never invited her here; but you know he travelled with her and her husband in California, and as she was staying with the Dexters when he visited them in Philadelphia, he included her in the invitation. She is the worst woman I ever knew.’

‘How little you know your own sex. The worst woman that you ever knew! Why, there is no down-right badness about her; she is rather *légère*, perhaps, but you know hosts of women who are worse than she is. I declare, Agatha, you know no more about the world of society than a girl of eighteen. I know many of that age who are wiser than you in such matters. If you would only take pity on me, and make a true, good

man of me, as a woman pure as yourself may make even the worst of men !'

'I am glad to learn that your conscience is awakened to the fact that you are *not* good and true, Frank. I have been awfully deceived in you. Until last evening I looked upon you as a perfectly moral man. I would as soon have thought of my father's making love to the wife of another as I would have thought of your doing such a thing.'

Earnestly as Agatha spoke, her cousin could not repress a smile. She saw it and continued,

'It is no trifling matter in my eyes, that of making love to another man's wife. I can assure you that after the occurrences of last evening, I felt for a time as though I never could speak to you again.'

'You quite intrigue me. What did you see that was so dreadful ?' asked Mortimer, in a tone of affected interest.

'I saw you kiss that woman's curls more than once, and once I saw you kiss her on her lips,' said Agatha, looking defiantly at him, as though she expected he would be brought to confusion by the weight of her accusation ; but he only shook his head, looking very austere, and incapable of such culpability.

'Do you deny it ?'

'The shadows must have deceived you,' he answered solemnly.

Rays of angry light darted from her eyes as bending forward she said,

'Frank, you are demoralised in more ways than one ; but how could I expect that you cared for the truth, when you could countenance disloyalty in a woman, to say nothing of having the sin upon your soul of leading her into it ? If you love Mrs. Grey, why do you not

love her well enough to help her bear the miserable lot that has befallen her—as a woman should bear all such sorrows as are hers—uncomplainingly ? Let your friendship lighten them, but do not seek to disgrace her.'

‘I love Mrs. Grey ! I have never made any profession of loving her. She only amuses me ; and when a man has nothing to live for, he is grateful to those who do but amuse him. There are a hundred women whom I like better than Mrs. Grey, and perhaps not one of the hundred who has the excuse that she has for forgetting her duties ; but let us drop this conversation, or if you wish to continue it, let us say no more of Mrs. Grey, but speak of women in general, and not particularise.’ He drew up a chair, and sat down near her, their faces confronting each other.

He continued, ‘Do you think there is any harm in making love to a pretty woman, even if she does happen to have a husband, when you have nothing better to do ? when, for instance, the woman whom you really love will not let you make love to her ? You see it is a necessity of man’s nature. One way or another, he is obliged to keep his hand in.’

Agatha looked sternly at him. ‘Have you no respect for the rights of others ? Do you think it is manly to rob another of what he values most ? If you had a wife, would you like other men to make love to her, and kiss her, just to keep their hands in ?’

‘No, by Jove ! I should not. You are quite right, as you always are, and I am wrong, fearfully wrong, in trying to distract myself by such a life as I am leading. Agatha ! if you will only try to love me a little ; I will not ask much, I will be satisfied with so little that surely you can give it to me to save me from perdition. If you will only be my wife, I swear to you, I will never breathe

a vow to any other woman. I will be as true as the needle to the pole.' He had seized one of her hands and was covering it with passionate kisses. So firmly did he hold it in both of his, that she made no effort to withdraw it, but looked at him in a vacant, bewildered way, as though she failed to catch the meaning of the tide of words that he poured out, without giving her a moment in which she could either check him or reply.

He continued, 'You must know the idolatry that is in my heart for you ; you must know how it has been consuming me like a smothered flame, consuming my better impulses and aspirations, I mean—I have never looked in any woman's eyes with any pure, true love, such as I feel for you. It is your coldness that has driven me to others, and made me what I am. Be more merciful, Agatha—be my wife, my darling. You will find no one to love you as I love you, my darling, darling Agatha.'

When at last he paused, she said quite frigidly,

'What does this mean? I daresay you will tell me next that I was dreaming this morning when I heard you say to Mrs. Grey, "Agatha is nothing to me, nor has she ever been."'

'No, I admit that you did hear me say those very words ; but you know that I spoke as falsely then as I am speaking truthfully now.'

She drew away the hand upon which he had been raining such burning kisses, and said.

'Am I to know by inspiration when your words are true and when they are false? I possess no such power of discrimination. I have heard of lunatics who always rave when the moon is at its full. I am perfectly sure that you are one of them.'

He arose, pacing the apartment excitedly.

‘She was right,’ he said. ‘No marble statue, no iceberg could be colder than you are, Agatha. You do not even know what it is to feel for another’s misery, and do you know what the poet says of such ?

To each their sufferings: all are men
Condemned alike to groan;
The tender for another’s pain,
The unfeeling for his own.

I hope the prophecy may be a false one in your case, but something tells me it will not be—that you will have woes of your own to bring you to feel for those of others. You are not only the coldest woman I have ever known, but you are the hardest upon the sins of others. Why it should have been my unhappy fate to love you is more than I can divine. I suppose, “because the heart is like water, it flows where it will,” as Lamartine says ; but God pity any man who follows in my footsteps, for you do not know what pity is.’

More mad words he would have said, stung as he was by the freezing, scornful tones of his cousin’s answer, but she interrupted him.

‘If, as you say, the heart is like water and flows where it will, why do you blame me, that mine will not flow where you would choose that it should ? You are both inconsistent and unreasonable. As for my being ice, or marble, or any other unlovable substance, I trust I shall continue to be, until I meet a man who is capable of loving one woman so entirely that he has neither temptation nor inclination to make love to another.’

Here she arose, adding as she gathered up the skirt of her riding habit in her hand, and turned to leave,

‘More than this ; I hope he will have such reverence

for the laws of God and man, that he will feel as little sympathy as I do for one who is so regardless of both that he degrades himself and others by his conduct, and his loose ideas of morality.'

She had gone before he had time to recover from the stunned sensation that her swiftly uttered words gave him. He pressed one hand to his forehead, and looked wildly after her. Then an awful appeal for vengeance broke from his lips, mingling as it did the names of Deity and fiend.

'Great God ! make her to love as hopelessly as I love her. I would sell my soul to the devil to bring it about.'

While in this moment of his despair his selfish love would have drawn down this curse upon Agatha, he would have been the last man in calmer hours to desire such a fate for any woman—far less for the one to whom he had given the purest love of his heart. But in these bitter moments it seemed to him that his love was transformed into hatred, and that the vengeance that he prayed for would be sweeter to him than life.

CHAPTER V.

THE lovely, sunny October days had gone, taking with them the last vestige of autumn's gay mantle, and November found Mr. Lee on his way to Omaha with his friends for the shooting excursion which they had planned ; leaving Mr. and Mrs. Carroll Tracey with Agatha, in sole possession of Seaciffe, their villa by the sea.

Colonel Potten, after learning that he had been at fault in interpreting his friend's postscript, and that Paul Howard had no designs upon his fair neighbour, never even having met her, took him over and introduced him ; and so it came about that they found him very agreeable company during the cheerless days that heralded November in, and kept them within doors. Morning after morning he sang with Mrs. Tracey, for she also was as wonderfully gifted in voice as himself ; possessing one of those charming mezzo-soprano voices, full of sympathetic qualities ; so fresh and rich and mellow, as to make listeners think of nightingales cleaving the air with their wings and soaring heavenwards as they sing. Mr. Tracey was never in the music-room, being much occupied with a German translation which he had promised for a given date ; and so hurried was he that, finding Agatha a good German scholar, he, upon several occasions, accepted the assistance which she offered ; for this was work that

Agatha delighted in. As the time drew near for its completion, she became more and more engrossed by her assumed labours, until not even the attractions of the music-room possessed sufficient power to detain her long from her fascinating occupation. This state of things lasted until the sullen November sky, which had seemed to pile up thicker and darker clouds day after day, at last stood out deep and blue, and there was no more rain nor fog, for as in the days of the Deluge, 'the former things had passed away.' And now, Agatha made her guests ride and drive and walk, and enjoy the glorious weather to her heart's content and their own ; and wherever they went, there Paul Howard was also ; and when they returned to the house after their various excursions, his rich baritone voice blended with Mrs. Tracey's, in song after song, while Agatha sat at the library table with Mr. Tracey, helping him to recover the time he had lost. One day, when Mrs. Tracey entered the library, and found Agatha elbow deep nearly in sheets of manuscript, which she was busily revising before submitting to her companion in literary labours, she said, sitting down beside her,

' How good you are to my husband ! I am sure that nothing on earth would tempt me to make such a drudge of myself. I do not see how you can translate one chapter, and Carroll the next, and not have it observable in the style of the translation.'

' I confess that surprises me,' answered Agatha, ' but Mr. Tracey says that no one would ever know that the chapters had not all been translated by the same person ; and I can see that it is so myself. I think there must be some sympathy between us, or that we must be *en rapport*. This passage which I have just translated will

explain the mystery ;' and Agatha read, 'I am almost afraid there must exist some affinity between us, or we would not so quickly have discovered what was sympathetic in each of us, nor would we have learned so soon to speak with such unreserved candour and to understand each other by a mere word or hint.'

Mr. Tracey, who had held his pen idly in his hand, while Agatha read, his handsome head still bent over his work, now glanced up at her. Their eyes met ; one quick look of appreciative recognition, soul speaking with soul, as it were, and he was once more hard at work. His eyes were peculiar eyes, of that pure grey which one rarely meets with, with long dark lashes ; and as Agatha caught this glance, a disturbing memory seized her and haunted her with dim recollections which she could not bring to the light. They surely reminded her of other eyes that she had seen, but when and where, she could not recall.

'Do you like German novels ?' asked Mrs. Tracey.

'They have a great fascination for me, but I cannot say that I like them as I do the works of Charlotte Brontë, Kingsley, George Eliot and other English authors. When compared with these, writers of the German school seem to possess but shallow merit.'

'But the German novels are so much more intellectual. Have you read "On the Heights ?"'

'I commenced it, but I could not finish it. I did not think that even you, with all your romance, could have patience to wade through that book.'

'I have read it three times, from beginning to end, and I consider it the novel of the age. I almost know it by heart—pages of it at least. Tell me, Agatha, where you will find a book with such deep, grand and

suggestive studies of human life as its pages unfold. I admit that there are some German novels which you cannot read without feeling bewildered before you reach the end, as to what is right and what is wrong ; but in all the moral questions treated of by Auerbach in that novel, there is not one that falls below humanity's highest ideal. I wish some people whom I could name would read it, it would do the work of an apostle.'

'I hope you do not know any people naughty enough to need such an apostle ; and if you did, you may rest assured that book would not help them much,' replied Agatha. 'As for books that bewilder one as to what is right and what is wrong—I never saw any such, and I hope I never may. What are you reading now ?'

'One of Spielhagen's—"From Night to Light,"—but I must not interrupt you any longer, for I see signs on Carroll's face that our chattering is disturbing him.'

'Not at all. I am only at a loss for a word here that expresses enough, without expressing too much,' said Mr. Tracey, taking up Agatha's copy of the book they were translating, and turning the leaves until he found the passage he was at work upon, pointing it out to her, saying, 'I wish you would glance over this, and then tell me how you would render the passage.' They held the book between them, looking over it together, and in doing so their hands met. Mr. Tracey withdrew his with such suddenness as to disconcert Agatha, whose face grew crimson. 'Let us each write out the translation and then compare them,' she said.

Mr. Tracey assented, and in a few moments the translations lay side by side. Bending over them, each read that of the other. Simultaneously, they both looked up.

‘What a singular coincidence !’ exclaimed Agatha, her voice as clear as the peal of a sweet-toned bell.

‘It is more than a coincidence,’ replied Carroll Tracey; but his voice was husky like that of one who seeks to smother some deep feeling. He resumed his work again, leaning his head wearily on one hand as he wrote with the other; his clear-cut profile turned towards Agatha, whose eyes still rested upon him, as if questioning some explanation. There were lines of care and sorrow in his singularly handsome face, which made it even more attractive than it would have been without them; and as Agatha glanced from him to his wife, she wondered what was the mystery of their life; for that there was one she had not been long in discovering.

‘Mildred, come here,’ she called, ‘I want to show you what a strange thing has happened. Mr. Tracey and I were translating the same passage. Read it, and see what an involuted sentence it is, and how enigmatically the author has expressed himself.’

Mrs. Tracey took the book, read the passage, and answered, ‘I have not the remotest idea what he wishes to say. I should call it the most transcendental of all transcendental ideas. What do you make of it?’

Agatha, without speaking, handed the two half-sheets of paper, and there were the two translations precisely the same, word for word, as if one had been copied from the other, and one was in the handwriting of Carroll Tracey, and the other in Agatha’s.

‘You must have each made your translations aloud,’ said Mrs. Tracey.

‘We did not, but no one will ever believe us. I feel an awfully weird sort of feeling, as if Mephistopheles had been standing at our elbows, and had himself dictated what we have written.’

As Mrs. Tracey walked back with her book to the window seat, where she had been reading, she said,

‘A decided case of affinity. I expect you will be my successor, Agatha.’

‘Which shows what an amazing amount of conceit you have in behalf of your husband,’ she replied, in no way embarrassed.

At this moment a servant brought in the card of Mr. Paul Howard to Mrs. Tracey, and she left the library to join him in the music-room.

Agatha, hard at work, never noticed that Carroll Tracey had laid aside his pen, and was regarding her steadfastly; but with a look in his eyes as though he were lost in a reverie. Suddenly looking up at last, she noticed him, and said,

‘Mr. Tracey, what are you thinking of?’

‘I daresay you would not feel the least interest, Miss Lee, if I were to tell you. And yet, what woman’s heart is without pity? I was thinking of a friend who has made the greatest mistake in his life that a man can make; and so, thrown all his chances for happiness in this world away.’

‘Poor fellow! but what *is* the greatest mistake that a man can make? I have no idea.’

‘To act from a mistaken sense of duty in points involving the happiness of others as well as his own.’

‘But a mistake acknowledged can surely be rectified. Where there is no sin—no crime, a mistake cannot be fatal in its consequences. In fact, as I believe, what we look upon sometimes as mistakes, are but events necessary to the unfolding and highest development of our powers. Possibly your friend may live to discover that his mistake will lead him into the greatest happiness of his life.’

‘Into its greatest misery rather, the misery of bringing home to him the daily contemplation of what “might have been” but for his folly.’

‘Standing in the dark as I do in reference to your friend’s error, of course I cannot judge for him; but if he has no greater misery to bear than the contemplation of what might have been if he had had the ordering and directing of his steps, instead of Providence, I should advise him to put more trust in God and less in his own capabilities.’

‘That is a woman’s way of reasoning.’

“*Vous êtes femme; vous ne comprenez rien,*” Count de Gobineau puts in the mouth of one of his characters; you go farther and say, “*Vous êtes femme; vous ne savez rien.*”

‘God forbid! on the contrary, I think with Goethe that men possessing the highest natures must have much of the woman in them, so exalted is my opinion of the sex. But I have never seen a woman who could reason logically; or rather, to speak literally, I have never seen a woman who could argue logically, that I would ever care to meet again.’

‘Which is equivalent to saying that you have met women who have driven you to the wall in argument, is it not?’

‘I daresay it might be so construed, but my meaning was, that women who are logical are generally so unwomanly, in one way or another, as to lose their greatest charms as women.’

‘Then, as you do not like reasoning women, you no doubt like impulsive ones.’

‘I like impulsive women who have sufficient strength of character to control and direct their impulses, instead

of allowing their impulses to govern them upon all occasions.'

'And I like men who are able to govern circumstances, and who are not so weak as to be governed by them, drifting with the tide into situations where they never would have drifted had they but chosen at the right moment to give two or three resolute strokes of the oar.'

'I thought you were a believer in destiny.'

'In destiny?—no. In Providence?—yes. But "God helps those who help themselves," and when mortals have acted to the best of their ability, working for some good end, and not for an evil one, good is sure to follow sooner or later. Your friend may have acted from a mistaken sense of duty, but the very fact that he did act from that sense is an assurance that he has made no mistake.'

'I trust that you, Miss Lee, will never make a mistake so fatal to your happiness in this life, as to convince you that your faith in Providence has been misplaced. The God in whom I believe has made us all free agents, to work out our own happiness or misery as we will; and having placed this power in our hands, He never interferes to do away with the consequences of our errors.'

'This is a subject that admits of no reasoning, no explanations; but as I look upon life, my conviction of my own existence is not stronger than is my belief in this rendering of a passage from Scripture—"All things work together for good to those who work for good." The promise is not given to the man who folds his hands and says, "Destiny must be accomplished, thou canst do nothing, thou canst only sit still, and not shrink away from it;" but to him who works for the accomplishment of his aims and ends. Did you ever come across this grand old Catholic hymn?—

God's justice is a bed, where we
 Our anxious hearts may lay,
 And weary with ourselves may sleep
 Our discontent away.

For right is right since God is God,
 And right the day must win ;
 To doubt would be disloyalty,
 To falter would be sin.

Roman Catholics seem never to forget what our Saviour died for—what, in fact, He lived for—was sent into the world for, namely, to teach us submission to the will of God.'

'I cannot see God's will in any rash acts of our own ; if I could, I would soon learn the lesson of submission. A man's life seems to me to be made up of a series of perpetual blunders ; and just as he arrives at an age to profit by his experiences and become wiser, his mental and bodily powers fail him, or else the end comes, and he dies like the worm that he is.'

'Do not say that ! There is no end : we are immortal.'

'I do not dispute that. I wish that I could, if there is to be for any of God's creatures an immortality of suffering.'

'But you do not believe in any such dogma : you cannot be so unjust to our Creator. You must know that although we are punished for our sins, punishment is of a reformatory and not of a vindictive character. If it were eternal, what end would be gained ?'

'I was not touching upon that question—too monstrous to entertain—that of everlasting punishment. I could not conceive a God so merciless, so wanting in all the attributes of a father ; but believing as I do, that when the end comes to us here it is but the beginning of an advanced stage of our being, a stage of progress still, in

which we are not sure of any immunity from suffering—where, for aught that we know, our discipline may partake of the same nature that it does in this life—“left blind upon the rocks to choose the right path from the wrong,” as we are here, I, for my part, have of late often wished that I were not immortal.’

What an unutterable sadness settled upon Carroll Tracey’s face as he said these words! He continued,

‘When one has drifted into the darkest night of an ice-bound Polar sea for want of the few resolute strokes, which you spoke of, that might have guided his barque into a tropical bay, one has fears that the beyond may also have dark and wintry seas, as well as summery havens.’

‘It hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive what God hath in store for them that love Him,’ quoted Agatha in reply, her fine eyes beaming with the zealous faith in her heart.

‘But it has entered into the heart of man to conceive and to promise just what he desires that life to be: one of rest and ease, streets of gold, gates of pearl, walls of jacinth. He has pictured the material where all is immaterial. We know no more of the life to come than we know from day to day here what our lives will unfold to us.’

‘But we do know,’ answered Agatha, her face lighted by the inspiration within—a very prophetess, she seemed, as her kindling soul looked out of her eyes—‘but we do know that, whether here or there, we are in the hands of One whom we can trust, even if we cannot see whither our footsteps tend; and though I do not know your friend, from what you have told me, I feel that however fatal he may consider his mistake, if he waits

and trusts, he will find some day that it was only an evil permitted in order to bring to him some great good—perhaps the greatest blessing of his life, as I have before said.'

Carroll Tracey could not resist the impulse that came to him to lift Agatha's hand to his lips tenderly, reverentially almost, saying as he did so,

'He *will* wait, and trust.'

CHAPTER VI.

COLONEL POTTON had entirely ceased his visits at Mr. Lee's villa after paying his call upon Mr. and Mrs. Tracey, and introducing his friend to Miss Lee in proper form. He found no difficulty in believing that friend's assurance that it was not at all necessary that he should do violence to his inclinations and accompany him in his frequent visits, as Miss Lee and Carroll Tracey were as well mated in their tastes and pursuits as were he and Mrs. Tracey. Never suspecting any weakness upon the part of Colonel Potten for 'the saint,' as he always called Agatha, he often sent shafts that would have been cruel ones had he known the state of his friend's feelings.

'No, old fellow, you are far better off at home with your books and your cigars than you would be trying to do the civil to people who just now have no thoughts for anyone but themselves. If you feel any interest, however, as to the result, I don't mind making a bet with you as to which succeeds first, Tracey or myself. As I look at it, it is about half a dozen of one and six of the other.'

'If I were to make any wager where the honour of women is concerned, it would be that my neighbour and friend, Miss Lee, is fully competent to take such care of her own honour that no man who possessed any would seek to cast a slur upon it,' said Colonel Potten angrily.

‘Have it as you choose, but I beg of you, do not make a grizzly bear of yourself,’ was Paul Howard’s only answer.

Upon the day of the conversation narrated in the last chapter he returned home in a state of unwonted exhilaration after a long walk on the cliffs with Mrs. Tracey. Colonel Potten, sitting in his library in a listless, moody frame of mind, heard him whistling the air of the song ‘She is mine, she is mine,’ as he crossed the strip of lawn that lay between the house and the boundary hedge of the property. As he opened the hall door his mellow voice broke out into the words, and never before had he sung them in such glad, exultant, triumphant tones.

‘I have not heard that song for the last ten days. You were always humming it or whistling it before,’ said Colonel Potten, roused from his reverie.

‘I have had a fit of the blue-devils for just that time. The rascals never stuck by me so long in my life before ; but it is always darkest just before day, you know,’ answered Howard, throwing himself full length upon the yielding, couch-like lounge.

‘You were born under a lucky star. There is a devilish sight more in luck than in brains.’

‘Do you think me wanting in that commodity ?’

‘By no means ; but let a man have ever so much, and he might as well go and hang himself, as far as any successes with women are concerned, if his star is not propitious.’

Howard surveyed complacently his well-shaped foot as he answered, ‘I flatter myself that I do not owe everything to my star ; that I possess some attractions in myself. I am not badly made. I stand six feet lacking one inch (when I wear my highest heeled boots),

and I have seen men with less distinguished faces than the one I own.'

Colonel Potten glanced at the physically superb man stretched out on the lounge before him. The Apollo head, set on a neck and shoulders worthy of it, was half buried in the garnet velvet cushion, against which his hair fell back from a forehead as white as ivory—black hair with shades of red flickering through it, such as artists love to paint; long reddish-brown lashes, and eyes that, in the reflected light of the blazing cannel coal, were velvety and glowing as those of a panther about to spring upon his prey. The soft, silken moustache was almost blonde, but with the same reddish hue warming it, coaxed back to reveal the sensuous mouth. The nose, chin, and cheeks were well cut, and of marble texture. Taking him all in all, there were few men his equal in personal attractions, not the least of which, in the eyes of some, were his rollicking ways, as well as the enchanting voice, which was fully as musical in conversation as in song.

'The gods were not niggardly in their gifts to you, it is true; but had you not been born under a lucky star, I still contend they would have been. Fate and Luck have it all their own way in this world,' said Colonel Potten, after making an inventory in his mind of his friend's striking points.

'Well, when my star bestows a fortune upon me, I shall believe in it—not before. By Jove! if I had money, my course would be clear.'

'That is what everyone thinks who has not got it; but I do not find that those who have it see their way any better than those who are not burdened with this world's goods.'

‘Well, I don’t mind telling you what I would do, if I were blessed with a fortune. I say, old fellow, I wish you wouldn’t fire up so whenever I speak of “the saint.” She may have been all ice and snow to other men, but I have seen a light in her eyes when she talks to Tracey that proves she is not ice to him. How long have they known each other?’

‘How should I know?’ answered Colonel Potten, seizing the poker, and making vigorous thrusts at the blazing coal, which sent showers of sparks up the chimney.

‘If Mrs. Tracey had the faintest touch of jealousy, it would help my cause; but, unfortunately, she has not. Things have got to such a pass, that morning, noon, and night they sit in the library—never even looking into the music-room—professedly occupied with a translation; but I feel sure there is more at the bottom than shows at the surface. Still waters run deep, you know.’

‘Yes, and shallow waters are always babbling ones. You don’t know what you are talking about. If Tracey had an atom of heart, which by the way he was never accused of possessing—for we were at the University together, and I knew him well—he would not waste it on a woman who laughs at all lovers, and who never goes beyond friendship with any man. I would like to see him, a married man, make love to her, with her strait-laced ideas! Besides, Tracey himself is a model of propriety. Who ever heard of his being involved with any woman? You might almost say he never looks at one. Why, he has no eyes for his wife even.’

‘Well, that last argument *is* conclusive, I admit; and yet there have been cases within the memory of man in which men with pretty wives noticed those of their

neighbours more than their own. Possibly, as you say Platonic love is Saint Agatha's hobby, their ambition is to set the world an example of a genuine attachment of that sort.'

'Which, within equal possibility, you and Mrs. Tracey will take much pleasure in following.'

'That is the unkindest cut of all! What have I ever done to make you think so badly of me? Platonic love, indeed!—Platonic humbug, I should say. There is no such thing in this world; and I have not so poor an opinion of the next as to fancy it may exist there.'

'You forget Chateaubriand and Madame Récamier, Madame de Sévigné and her friendships, and all the other Platonic attachments recorded in biographies and memoirs.'

'Yes, Abelard and Héloïse, and all: all of the same sort in my eyes. Do you suppose that all this twaddle about friendship was for any other purpose than to mislead, or that those French *bas-bleus* disclosed their real sentiments in their letters any more than we do in our letters in this generation? We all wear masks, and all of us are in solemn earnest in our efforts to obey the eleventh commandment—'Be sure that your sins do not find you out'—however much we may disregard the other ten. I find the world of society divided into two classes, the humanely virtuous, and the rigidly virtuous, and all my experience goes to show that the latter class includes the worst sinners in their ranks.'

'Then you must class yourself with the rigidly virtuous.'

'By no means. I am no hypocrite; nor am I more severe upon the failings of others than upon my own. I bestow upon all who need it the charity that I require

myself, which no rigidly virtuous person, in the sense I use the words, ever does. No, I belong to the humanely virtuous class. Do you remember that old French colonel who used to regale us with his affairs of the heart, and how cleverly he put the case for Madame Récamier ?'

'Yes, and I remember how you "brought the house down" one night in Merryvole's tent, by saying that no man believed in Platonic love excepting querulous old men like Chateaubriand, who were too old to be capable of any other. You hit the old fellow hard, for he prided himself upon his love affairs.'

'He used to quote, "Love knows no difference between May and December;" but the truth is, there is more of the ludicrous than the heroic to me in the loves of the children of men who have turned forty.'

'Spare me,' said Colonel Potten. 'Not that I intend to make a dolt of myself at present, but may I be shot if I do not believe I am capable of a stronger passion at my age than I ever was before, and I have passed forty. Did you find the little woman more gracious to-day than you came home in such high spirits ?'

'Well, I have no reason to be discouraged ; at the same time I cannot say much as to my success. I dare say I should not have gained an iota, however, if I had not changed my tactics, and threatened to drown myself out of sheer despair at her prolonged coldness.'

'You do not tell me that she was deluded by such a worn-out ruse.'

'It was no ruse. I was so much in earnest, that I felt just in the mood for doing it. I generally am in earnest at the time, whatever I may say ; it is the only way to carry conviction with you. But then no weather-vane

ever changed more frequently than I change my intentions.'

'No, and your loves also. I pity the woman you marry.'

'Keep your pity, my friend, for me, when I become such a fool as to marry. How any man in his senses can tie himself to one woman—not that I mean confine himself to one—but how he can bind himself to confer upon any woman the privilege of calling him to account for all his intrigues and affairs with others, is more than I can comprehend.'

'You would marry Mrs. Tracey to-morrow, if she were free to marry you.'

'Would I? I would see her in heaven first.'

'Then you are a colder-blooded wretch than I thought.'

'On the contrary, it is just because I am not cold-blooded, that I would spare her the fate of being so miserable as I should be sure to make any woman who was my wife. But I will tell you what I would do if I were a rich man. I would run away with her, if I could persuade her to an elopement; and she is the first woman I have ever seen for whom I have had such a temptation as that.'

'While you are my guest, I expect you to conduct yourself like a gentleman, and not like a scoundrel,' said Colonel Potten, emphasising the last word.

'I assure you I am obliged to do so. I cannot afford to be a scoundrel, although, between you and me and our Maker, I believe in His sight that man is the greater scoundrel of the two who—— But never mind what I believe, I shall not forget the duty that I owe to society and its eleventh commandment.' He spoke seriously now, adding after a moment's pause, 'If we had met

before she was a married woman, and I had possessed an income sufficient to marry upon, then it might have been a question of marriage between us ; but as it is, there is no possibility of that now, and there never will be. If she wished for a divorce, she could not get one. Her husband is perfectly true to her ; he is in no way tyrannical, he is even indulgent. She could not plead incompatibility of temper, since they never disagree ; but I ask you, what hell could be worse for a heart throbbing with warmth and life than to find itself chained to a cold and pulseless one—a living body bound to a corpse ?'

‘Mrs. Tracey has evidently taken you into her confidence. I think those are matters that should be held sacred between husband and wife.’

‘Mrs. Tracey has never even alluded to any of her experiences to me. I know only what I have seen for myself, and what all the world knows—that she is an unloved wife.’

‘And I,’ answered Colonel Potten, ‘have had occasion to remark before that all the world generally knows more about us than we know of ourselves. I dare say if Mr. Tracey were informed of the existing state of things between himself and Mrs. Tracey, as represented, he would feel pretty much as a man would feel who without any previous warning sees a bombshell drop through his roof. I do not credit the fictions that are always in circulation concerning persons of any social consequence whatever. Tracey has the misfortune to be both handsome and rich, as well as talented. His wife is as wonderfully gifted in song as in beauty ; the women cannot forgive her that their husbands and lovers find her so attractive, and hence they take their revenge by gossiping about her. This is my

explanation of the reports that every now and then reach me. I confess, however, that were I in his place I would let literature go to the dogs, and look after my wife a little more. There is nothing more dangerous to a woman's peace of mind than to feel herself neglected, and to find sympathy in one whose tastes are congenial to her own. You are both passionately fond of music, Tracey is most certainly entirely absorbed in his translation just now, or he would see the danger of throwing his wife into such constant and close companionship with a man who is said to be unprincipled in all his affairs with women.'

'Come, come, be fair with me ; don't believe what the world says of me, because I am unfortunately the envy of my sex. Have you ever known me to behave dishonourably towards any woman ?'

'No, I never have. The greatest fault that you possess in my eyes is that you talk too much about your affairs. Not that you ever reveal anything which honour bids you to conceal ; but according to my ideas, if a man has any affair in hand, the woman's name should never pass his lips ; and when it is ended, he should never allude to her but in praise.'

'That would depend upon how it ended, according to my way of thinking,' said Howard, with a meaning laugh ; 'and certainly, if you avoid mentioning a woman's name whom you have been in the habit of commenting upon, no better ground for suspicion could be given, I am sure. By the way, I heard this morning that Mrs. Rivers's dinner is to be given for Miss Penn, with whom I had that little flirtation last year, and that she is trying to bring about a match between her and her nephew, Atherton. Think of handing over a girl of such

talents as she possesses to a half-witted chimpanzee like Atherton. Ugh! it gives one a chill.'

'It is a lucky thing that you spoke of the dinner. I had entirely forgotten it. The coupé will be around in an hour, which is as short a time, I fancy, as an exquisite like yourself could get himself up for a dinner.'

'Hang five o'clock dinners; one can never get up any appetite so early in the day,' was Howard's only answer as he left the room.

CHAPTER VII

AT a quarter before five the coupé was at the door. It was fully a fifteen minutes' drive, and Colonel Potten was too well-bred a man not to time it so as to arrive on the stroke of the hour designated. In another quarter of an hour the invited guests were all assembled, and dinner was announced. It now became evident that the dinner was not given for Miss Penn, but for Mrs. Mordaunt, of Boston, who was staying with them, as she was taken out by Mr. Rivers and was seated upon his right. Carroll Tracey, by virtue of his literary reputation, had the honour of taking his hostess into the dining-room, and on his right was a Miss Lennox, of New York, who had dabbled in literature as an amateur, and not unsuccessfully. If Colonel Potten was as well pleased to be also seated next to Miss Lennox as she was to have him so seated, the success of the dinner, as far as they were concerned, was assured ; for she had never quite recovered from a certain weakness which she had for him in the earliest days of her maidenhood. Paul Howard was well satisfied with his seat at table, for fate (or Mrs. Rivers) had placed him between Mrs. Carroll Tracey and Miss Latimer, a niece of the host, who was sprightly and pretty, as well as an old acquaintance. If congenial, such qualifications go far towards insuring a pleasant time at a dinner, whereas,

if one finds himself or herself seated next to an entire stranger, one is apt to feel like a second Columbus starting out upon an unknown voyage. The dinner party was not a large one. The young lady previously spoken of, Miss Penn of Philadelphia, who was neither pretty nor plain, having made an equally narrow escape from either of these extremes, was seated between Mr. Jenkins, a New York swell, whose resemblance to 'Count Fosco' was so striking that he often went by that name, and Mr. Atherton, a wealthy Boston bachelor, whom rumour had fixed upon as a suitor for Miss Penn's hand. Miss Penn was rusticating with a widowed aunt (who never appeared in society) after a summer of gaiety at Sharon and Long Branch, where, despite her being no beauty, she had been called the belle of the season. This was a sufficient reason for Mr. Jenkins to play the part of a devoted lover, for his devotions were always reserved for belles, both married and single. Miss Penn, thus finding herself between two fires, set herself to work to make the most of each of them.

'How lovely in Mrs. Rivers to have given me this seat!' she said to Mr. Atherton, looking up into his face, her blue eyes full of the tender sentiment, he thought, as he returned the glance, and gave free expression to his approbation of Mrs. Rivers's arrangement of her guests; but dinner was not half over before she had said to Mr. Jenkins with a sigh of weariness,

'What am I to do with this bore? Take compassion upon me, I beg of you, and do not leave me to his mercies, which are tenderer than this *filet* even, tender as it is. I hope that you are not a worshipper at the shrine of Saint Agatha, and that Mr. Bartholomew is; for then he will monopolise her, and you will have to devote your-

self to me, or to your dinner. If I know you, you are quite capable of doing both.'

Mr. Jenkins looked very solemn; that is to say, as much so as a man with so very round a face and rotund a figure could look.

'Did you ever know of a man in love having any appetite for his dinner?' he said.

'How charming! Are you really in love? How good in you to make me your *confidente*! Some married woman, I dare say; as it has quite gone out of fashion for young men to fall in love with unmarried ones.'

'She is not married yet; but rumour says that she soon will be;' and having given utterance to these words he drew a long sigh, and looked so meaningly into Miss Penn's eyes that she was not left in doubt as to the one he wished her to think was the object of his concealed passion.

'True love never did run smoothly, you know; there must be anxieties and crosses, and all sorts of perplexities, but if it be true love, and those who indulge in it are true to themselves, it is quite sure to come out right in the end, is it not?' Miss Penn looked artlessly unconscious and sympathetic as she said these words.

'Ah, but when the love is all on one side, how then?'

'But love begets love, you know. There is no disease in the world so contagious as love, I fancy.'

'I wish I could think so, but my experience has been that while some natures are quick to take infection, others remain proof against it, no matter how often they are exposed.'

'Then, when such natures do yield to the contagion, I dare say there would be a life and death struggle. I

am thankful I do not belong to that class, for I have always taken contagious diseases so readily, that I have gotten over everything just as easily, from hooping-cough to scarlet fever.' Miss Penn's arch smile seemed to mock the pathetic eyes that Mr. Jenkins had fastened upon her. '*A propos de bottes*,' she continued, 'how did Miss Lee acquire the name of Saint Agatha?'

'I assure you the question is quite *à propos*; it is just because she has escaped all contagion that it has been given to her. I cannot go into particulars now, as we should be sure to be overheard; but she is one of the most unimpressionable of beings, and I fancy some one of her numerous rejected lovers has given her that name. Certainly, I would as soon think of making love to a saint as to her, so cold and unsympathetic have I always found her.'

'Are you in the habit of making love to old maids?' asked Miss Penn, who, scarcely eighteen, looked upon Agatha as already belonging to the sisterhood.

'Not when younger maidens are within reach; though when a man finds a woman congenial, he does not always stop to look up family records and get at her age, does he?'

'But he ought to, if he has any serious intentions: for of all pitiable things, I think the most pitiable is to see a young man so in love with a woman very much older than himself that he is willing to ignore all such difference and marry her. He brands himself with the words "taken in;" and no matter how agreeable, how attractive he may be, or how noble a character he may have, he is regarded as an object of pity, and will be so long as the woman lives. Any woman who really and truly loved

a man, and had the sense to know how such marriages always end, would never accept such a sacrifice.'

'You speak warmly and feelingly.'

'I have reason so to speak. My brother married a woman old enough to be his mother, and insists upon it that love is no respecter of age as well as no respecter of persons. When his infatuation is over, he will awaken to the inevitable consequences.'

At this moment Mr. Atherton, who had become restive under the absence of all attention, ventured to remind Miss Penn of his existence, by asking when she expected to return home.

'I have no expectations for the future; I live only in the present,' she answered; a little dash of impatience at the interruption manifest in her voice. 'I am in no hurry to return, I can assure you.'

'I am very glad to hear that, as it gives me the hope that you are not very much attached to Philadelphia as a place of residence,' remarked Mr. Atherton, looking thoroughly frightened at his own boldness when the words had escaped him.

'I am not very much attached to any place of residence. I often wish I had been born a gipsy, for then I could have gratified my roving propensities.'

'But surely one need not be born a gipsy in order to do that. Don't you think you would like to live in Boston?'

'I am sure I should, if for no other reason than that its noble old commons would make such a charming place for a gipsy encampment.'

'Don't you think you would like to live in New York as well?' asked Mr. Jenkins. 'There is room in the park for several gipsy encampments.'

‘Ah, New York is the Garden of Eden,’ said Miss Penn enthusiastically.

‘That is refreshing, as all original ideas are. I have heard it called Sodom, but never the Garden of Eden before.’

‘New York the Garden of Eden!’ said Miss Lennox, who was *vis-à-vis*. ‘Pray tell me, Mr. Jenkins, if you know one striking difference that exists between New York and the Garden of Eden?’

‘Is that a conundrum? because if it is I give it up. I never guessed a conundrum in my life,’ he answered. ‘Pray enlighten me.’

‘Willingly. In the Garden of Eden there was only one Adam, one Eve, and one serpent; and in New York there is no end of Adams, Eves, and serpents.’

‘I don’t see it. ‘Pon my honour I do not. Who dresses in fig-leaves now? What man complains, or tells, if a woman does tempt him in these days? As for serpents, out of Barnum’s museum you surely could not find a serpent in all New York,’ answered Mr. Jenkins.

‘Rather trespassing on your grounds, Miss Lee,’ remarked Colonel Potten to Agatha.

‘My grounds are public property; they belong to the age,’ she answered.

Miss Penn had already said,

‘I will qualify my words. I mean that New York is a Paradise; and I am sure mortals are excusable if, like myself, they all wish to live in Paradise.’

Mr. Atherton, whose face had brightened when Miss Penn had spoken so rapturously of Boston, was looking rather desponding again, as he mentally reviewed Mr. Jenkins’s chances in contrast with his own. Still he determined it should not be his fault if Boston were not

properly appreciated, and at the first lull in the conversation, which had suddenly become general, he said, 'Boston has many advantages over New York, one of which is that its society is infinitely more select. I think you would like life there even better, if you were once to try it. There are all sorts of entertainments ; balls at Papanti's, as well as those at private houses, dinners and receptions, charade parties, musicals, private theatricals, lectures, and——'

'Spare, oh spare me the lectures !' exclaimed Miss Penn, interrupting the catalogue. 'There is no end of lectures in Philadelphia, although I never attend them, for I get quite as many as I am able to endure at home ; but, Mr. Atherton, when I go to Boston I shall certainly engage you as a cicerone for everything but the lectures.'

Perfectly oblivious of the twinkle in Miss Penn's eyes, Mr. Atherton answered, 'If you would only remember that promise, what pleasure it would give me to show you my capabilities in that line ! Our drives, too ! we have splendid roads to bowl over ; I hope you like both riding and driving, Miss Penn.'

'I know of nothing that I enjoy more, unless it be dancing. What a pity you do not dance, Mr. Atherton ! But I dare say Boston men are too dignified. Their brains do not lie in their heels, as those of New York men are said to do.'

Mr. Atherton's small, weak face expanded with the radiance that illuminated it at these words. He evidently considered his star in the ascendant.

'I think we prefer the manlier sports of shooting and yachting,' he answered gravely, never doubting that Miss Penn was serious.

'But one cannot shoot, and yacht, and drive all the

time ; and dancing comes in when all else in the way of amusement fails one. Now, here is Mr. Jenkins, who waltzes like a dream, and he will tell you that in the present state of society no other accomplishment goes so far. You must learn to dance, Mr. Atherton.'

' I shall learn ; oh, yes, I certainly shall learn ; that is if I can ; ' suddenly remembering former attempts, in which he had not succeeded brilliantly, owing to deficiencies both in time and tune, phrenologically speaking. ' But my yacht and my horses have afforded me more pleasure than ball-room dissipations thus far in my life.'

' How cruel you are to devote yourself to that *vol-au-vent* after such an absorbing fashion ! ' said Miss Penn, addressing Mr. Jenkins with one of her appealing looks for succour.

' Appearances are frequently deceptive,' he replied. ' My mind was not upon the *vol-au-vent*, if it appeared to be. Not a word has escaped me, and my heart has been torn with anxiety as I have listened. There is not a shadow of a chance for a man like myself, whose "brains lie in his heels," and who possesses but the one accomplishment of dancing, against one who owns a yacht, horses, a house in Boston, and whose services as *valet de place* are, from his own account, invaluable.' This was said *sotto voce*.

' I did not say that you possessed but one accomplishment, Mr. Jenkins ; you go too far and too fast, like all New Yorkers. I am quite sure that, although you may be envied by many for your consummate skill in dancing, there are far more who envy you for another accomplishment that you possess, and which is in itself a sufficient proof that your brains are where they ought to be.'

‘I am lost in conjectures as to what other accomplishment I have. I assure you that I know of no other. My education was sadly neglected ; I am not a good horseman ; I can’t even row a boat, to say nothing of sailing one. There is no chance for me, and I feel myself growing desperate with the knowledge.’

‘Do you rate your conversational powers at zero ? Others do not if you do. I would rather have for a companion a man who could amuse and interest me, than one possessing a category of accomplishments as long as Mr. Atherton’s pedigree, if he displayed his gifts to the wearying of all those who came within his reach, as men with accomplishments so often do. I wonder, by the way, that our friend has not yet touched upon his hobby.’ The last sentence was said in such a low tone that Mr. Atherton could not possibly have heard it, but, as if in reply to Miss Penn’s remark, he said at this moment,

‘I think your name is a historical one, Miss Penn, is it not ?’

‘We are not related to the Penns to whom you refer. My grandfather was a very plain old gentleman, who used to say that he had never had any distinguished relations ; but I think, had you ever seen him, you would have agreed with me in thinking that he did not need any to support his claims to consideration.’ Then turning to Mr. Jenkins, she said, ‘Never say that you have no accomplishments ; remember Dickens’s Uriah, and do not be too humble.’

Meantime others had taken up the merits and demerits of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia society ; and Miss Lennox had declared that in a recent visit to the latter city she had found private theatricals to be the

principal amusement of the *beau monde* in public ; and in private, that of discussing the affairs of their neighbours.

‘ How exciting life in Philadelphia must be ! ’ said Colonel Potten. ‘ I wonder you do not go over for a winter, Bartholomew ; you are so fond of excitement.’

‘ I had enough of it one summer at that Hotel at Long Branch, where the elect of the Quaker city congregate ; but I owe a debt of gratitude to a charming little woman, who saved me from dying, and so I cherish grateful recollections of Philadelphia.’

‘ What was your disease ? ’ asked Mr. Atherton, with an expression of the deepest interest.

‘ Stupidity.’

‘ The charming little nurse, who was *she* ? Some pretty young widow, I daresay,’ said Colonel Potten.

‘ No, not a widow ; but she would have been better off if she had been, for her husband, who was old enough to be her father, was a *mauvais sujet*.’

‘ But would *you* have been better off ? That is of more interest to us,’ asked Paul Howard.

‘ That must be ’65 wine that you are drinking, Howard. Take my advice, and let it be your last glass,’ he answered. ‘ I was going to narrate——’

‘ Listen ! Mr. Bartholomew is going to give us the particulars of his affair. I am sure they will be worth hearing.’

‘ I am not in the habit of talking of my affairs when I have any,’ answered Mr. Bartholomew, rather pointedly ; ‘ but in this instance there was no “ affair.” ’

‘ Mr. Atherton, you seem to be in the clouds,’ said Mrs. Rivers, after making several ineffectual attempts to engage him in the animated conversation which those of her guests who were seated on the other side of her were

indulging in ; while Mr. Rivers, at his end of the table, was holding forth in rather an oratorical style, with his nearest neighbours as listeners, occasionally bespeaking the attention of others by some remark addressed to them.

Mr. Atherton protested that he was not in the clouds, and made amends for his remissness in bestowing his undivided attention upon Mrs. Rivers, which left Miss Penn at liberty to be as devoted as she chose to Mr. Jenkins.

‘ I maintain,’ said Mr. Rivers, his voice rising to still higher tones, ‘ that it is no honour to be sent to Congress in these days ; and I leave it to you, Colonel Potten, if you were in Washington during the session, and a Congressman were to call upon you in your apartment, would you not lock your bureau drawers and your trunks before leaving him, in case you should be called out of the room during his visit ? ’

‘ I am not prepared to assent to that exactly ; but I agree with the diplomatist who said, “ Go out into the world, my son, and see what fools it is governed by,” ’ answered the Colonel. ‘ You remember, perhaps, that some one of our statesmen was once taken by a celebrated Englishman to Eton, where the boys were made to pass in review before them. “ Fine fellows ! ” said the American. “ Yes,” answered his friend, “ but how pitiable to think they are to grow up into paltry members of Parliament.” ’

‘ I’ll wager my head that Mr. Rivers has been up for Congress and been defeated,’ whispered Mr. Jenkins to Miss Penn.

‘ Make it your heart instead of your head, and I’ll accept the wager ; but, seriously speaking, is that the way men do ? I had no idea they were so much like women.’

Mr. Jenkins's reply brought such a tender light into Miss Penn's eyes as to betray that it was something very gallant.

Mr. Rivers continued, as if in evidence against the truth of Mr. Jenkins's assertion, 'There is no office in the gift of the United States that I would hold ; not even that of President.'

' Possibly you might be induced to reconsider that resolution, as Governor Jones was ; for I heard him say that he would not accept the nomination, before it was made,' said Colonel Potten.

' He only did accept it out of the purest patriotism,' replied Mr. Rivers. ' It was not for his interest, for he gave up a lucrative business at the demand of his State, feeling that his services were needed.'

' Or the demand of his wife—which was it ? Possibly she may have been more patriotic than her husband. I have heard that, although the Governor is fond of horses, and likes to hold the reins in his own hands, it is his wife who tells him which way to drive.'

' Your remark, Colonel Potten, illustrates my meaning. Mrs. Jones has been publicly denounced as a virago, and no wife was ever less of one than she. I said I would not be the President, and this is just why I would not hold any office : everyone feels privileged to gossip privately about people who hold prominent positions ; but as long as they are only private citizens, their wives are free from newspaper attacks. Let them accept an office, and every editor who possesses the nature of a blackguard can disgrace his columns with assaults upon those who are dearer to a man than his own life ; sewing broadcast falsehoods concerning them, which the rabble

is but too glad to believe. Take my word for it, the Governor not only holds the reins, but he drives whatever road he wishes. Whenever I find anyone attacked in a public journal, I am always reminded of a remark made by a friend of mine: "Let those who wish to escape censure and abuse, take some back road," said he, "for they can't travel the main turnpike and escape it."

'I think Mrs. Jones might be reconciled to calumnies under the circumstances of her position,' said Mr. Tracey. 'Besides, calumnies never stick where there is nothing for them to rest upon; they are blown away by the first breeze. Society must have its dish of gossip flavoured with piquant sauce, and it is a consolation to those who are thus served up to know that it is only persons of importance whose private affairs can be supposed to have any interest for the public.'

'Very true,' replied Mr. Rivers. 'I remember hearing a story told of Mr. Bennett and some politician, which is to the point. He entered the office with eyes flashing indignation and demanded satisfaction for a column and a half of abuse that the Herald of the previous day contained concerning him. "A column and a half," echoed Mr. Bennett, "Why, sir, it is a proud man you ought to be this day: there are but few men in New York that my paper would devote a column and a half of space to."

'I daresay the politician went away quite pacified,' answered Mr. Tracey, 'though it is always wiser to exercise philosophy in behalf of others than where one's own self is concerned. You know Swift said, that he had never known a man who did not enjoy the misfortunes of his friends, or at least bear them

with calmness; but a little virtuous indignation felt on behalf of others, instead of enjoyment of their discomfiture, would often save a repetition of the same experience for ourselves, I have no doubt.'

'Really, Mr. Tracey, you will not often find such an opportune moment to put all your fine sentiments into use,' said Miss Penn. 'Here's Mr. Jenkins pointing his morals and adorning his tales with no end of illustrations at my expense, or rather, at the expense of the morals of the city of my birth. Have neither you nor Mr. Rivers one word to say in my behalf?'

'All that I can say, and I regret to say it,' answered Mr. Tracey, 'is, that if all that I heard of the morals of society in the Quaker city the year that I resided there, be true, it has no morals to speak of.'

Here Mr. Rivers interposed, feeling it to be his duty to say a few words in behalf of the home of one of his guests, and he remarked, 'Without doubt Philadelphia must be a very moral city, as the Quaker element so preponderates there. Which city do you suppose to be the most moral, Colonel Potten—New York, Boston, or Philadelphia?'

'I suppose human nature to be the same everywhere, or, as a friend of mine once expressed it, man is pretty much the same scoundrel now that he was three thousand years ago, in the days of the patriarchs. In Boston married people call their flirtations "affinities," and talk of "a higher law;" in New York they do as they choose without making any excuses or explanations. I do not know much about Philadelphia, but if the people walk any straighter there, I daresay it is because their

streets are so straight that they are compelled to ; or, in other words, because everyone there knows what everyone else is doing.'

'What an inconvenient city to live in !' remarked Mr. Jenkins. 'Do you endorse Colonel Potten's opinion, Miss Penn ?'

'I go farther, and say that persons there not only know what everyone else is doing, but they know more about us than we know about ourselves. I could not begin to tell you how many times they have announced my engagement, although I assure you, confidentially, there is not a man there whom I would promise to marry even in sport.'

'Promise to marry in sport ! Is *that* one of the amusements of Philadelphians ? How very naughty of you !' said Mr. Jenkins, while Mr. Atherton found courage to whisper, 'As I am not a Philadelphian, won't you promise me, even if it is only in sport ?'

'Certainly, upon one condition,' she answered gaily.

'And what is that condition ? Do not make it too hard for me, I beg of you ;' and Mr. Atherton looked quite elated at the progress he was making.

'Oh, a very simple one, namely, that you will wait until I am ready to be married, and that if I see anyone in the meantime whom I like better, that you will let me break the engagement.'

'Ah, but I hold you to your word ; you said one condition, and now you wish to make it two. No, I accept the first, I will wait until you are ready to be married, but I cannot promise to let you off under any circumstances,' he said, still speaking in low tones.

They were all rising from the dinner table, when Mr. Atherton whispered to Mrs. Rivers, 'You can announce

my engagement. Miss Penn has promised to marry me.'

'Really! you surprise me. Well, I congratulate you with all my heart. You have secured the belle of the season.'

'Secured' was a bold word to use concerning Miss Penn; but Mrs. Rivers never doubted that Mr. Atherton had spoken sincerely, and that his sixty thousand a year had proved irresistible, even with the owner as an incumbrance.

'Mr. Atherton has given me permission to announce his engagement,' she said to Miss Penn, as they were taking their coffee in the drawing-room.

Miss Penn replied, 'If you announce it you must be sure to mention the fact that he is only half engaged.'

'Only half engaged! how can that be?' asked Mrs. Rivers.

'Why, if *he* is engaged, I am not! Certainly out of that you cannot make more than half an engagement.'

Notwithstanding Miss Penn's contradiction, the rumour took wings, as rumours have a way of doing, much to her amusement at first; then to her annoyance for a time; but in the end, apparently to her entire satisfaction; for on her return to Philadelphia, she no longer denied the engagement, but received the congratulations of her friends with a smiling face, and was soon so engrossed with shopping and dress-makers as to make the inference a highly probable one that the marriage would not be long deferred. It was reported that her mamma had said to more than one person, 'You see what perseverance will accomplish! Anna refused Mr. Atherton over and over again, but she has taken him at last.' And rumour also said that Miss Penn would not

have taken him, rich as he was, had not her mamma pleaded in his behalf, at the same time that her hopes in another quarter were extinguished ; for Mr. Jenkins did not follow her to her home as he had promised to do ; and from more than one of her New York acquaintances she heard that he had become infatuated with a Cuban belle whose fortune equalled her beauty.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE day following that of Mrs. Rivers's dinner, Agatha and Mr. Tracey were occupied with their translations in the library, when Mrs. Tracey looked in and said,

'You are the most uncompanionable people I was ever shut up with in the dreary month of November. Do leave that horrid translation, and come and take a walk. Carroll, make Agatha come ; it is a sin and shame to allow her to tire herself out in your service every day, as she is doing.'

A troubled expression came over Mr. Tracey's face, as he answered, 'You are quite right, Mildred. I dare-say Miss Lee does over-fatigue herself ; but it never occurred to me before, or I would not have been so selfish as to permit her to assist me so much.'

'I am not in the least fatigued,' protested Agatha, looking up into Mr. Tracey's face, and meeting the compassionate eyes that were fastened upon her. For a moment she seemed embarrassed by the lurking tenderness in the look that she encountered, and a soft, warm colour flew to her face, settling in crimson spots on either cheek, as, turning to Mrs. Tracey, she added,

'I think myself, Millie, that you are abominably treated, but this translation is absorbing, and just now I am so interested in this chapter that I am finishing.'

Won't you sit down here with your book, and the instant that I reach the end I will go out for a walk ; and you will go with us, Mr. Tracey, will you not ?'

'I will go now, if you say so,' he replied.

'Will you ? Then, you go with Millie, and I will follow you in half an hour or so,' she said eagerly.

He shook his head. 'I am not so selfish as to leave you alone to finish my work.'

At this moment Paul Howard appeared on the piazza, and, crossing the length of it, entered the hall at the open door. As he approached, Mrs. Tracey exclaimed,

'How fortunate ! I was just wishing for a *preux chevalier*, for these German-mad enthusiasts are so wrapped up in their translations that I could not prevail upon either of them to go down to the cliffs with me.' She glanced back over her shoulder at Agatha and her husband, as she left the room, saying, 'I am heartily glad to be so independent of both of you. Mr. Howard will take charge of me, and prevent me from throwing myself into the sea in a fit of desperation, or despair, or some dreadful emotion brought on by your apathetic indifference to me.'

How handsome she looked ! her laughing blue eyes fringed with long, dark lashes, roses upon her cheeks, and her lips parted just enough to disclose her dazzling teeth.

Agatha kissed her hand to her, as she passed the library window leaning on Paul Howard's arm.

'How beautiful Millie is ! I think she grows lovelier every day,' said Agatha, arranging her papers to continue her writing. Receiving no reply, she looked in Mr. Tracey's face, only to encounter the same serious gaze which had embarrassed her a few moments before. As their eyes met, by some irresistible impulse he reached

forward and took one of her hands between both of his own ; so reverentially, as well as tenderly, that she made no effort to withdraw it.

‘Can you pardon me, Miss Lee, for having so thoughtlessly allowed you to weary yourself day after day over this work ?’

‘I assure you it has not wearied me. It has been the greatest pleasure to me ; indeed it has !’ answered Agatha, trying to retain her usual serenity, but finding it difficult with her heart fluttering, and her little hand trembling, like birds when first imprisoned.

Mr. Tracey, who was entirely self-possessed, continued gravely, ‘It has been such a happiness to me, that I have never even thought of the injury it might be to you to sit so much over your writing,—you, who are entirely unused to confinement.’ He lifted her hand to his lips before releasing it, and kissing it added, ‘I must be less selfish in future.’ Then he resumed his writing.

There was a new strange light in Agatha’s eyes as she bent over her papers. For the first time in her life the touch of another had sent the blood pulsating through her veins in magnetic waves. In vain she endeavoured to fasten her mind upon her translation, but after several ineffectual attempts she said laughingly,

‘Mildred has so broken in upon my abstraction as to make it impossible for me to concentrate my thoughts upon my work as before. I am not fit to write any more to-day, I see ; and I will run up and get my shawl and follow her.’

She had already started from her chair when Mr. Tracey detained her by saying, ‘No, don’t go. We can afford a holiday. If you will stay, I will lay aside my writing, and finish telling you that little history, or

romance, or whatever you choose to call it, that I commenced the other day.'

'Which is it really—a true history or a romance?' asked Agatha. 'It cannot be both. It must be one or the other. I rather think it is a real experience, which one of your friends has confided to you; and some day you will found a romance upon it, and become a novel writer, as well as a translator and a contributor to the serials.'

God forbid I should ever publish such an experience! No, there is far too much reality in it. All that I have told you has happened; and you must never forget that you alone have been entrusted with a history which I could not have disclosed to you even, had I not concealed the actors in it by substituting assumed names.'

'You may trust me without any fear.'

'And I wish you would trust me in return, and allow me to be the friend that I feel myself capable of being to you; or do you not believe in friendships between men and women?'

'Not believe in them! My faith in immortality is not stronger. I believe most religiously in such friendships, and more than that, it has been the desire of my life to have such a friend. Certainly, I will trust you, Mr. Tracey, and I shall be proud of your friendship.'

Agatha was in no way embarrassed now. She felt that the same attraction which he had exerted over her was in like manner felt by him; and with perfect frankness she continued, after the short pause which he did not break, 'You do not know how happy it makes me, Mr. Tracey, to have found such a friend at last, and one too who I need never fear will turn into a lover. I wanted

you to like me because Mildred and I are such friends, and because I liked you the first moment that I saw you. Do you know, I think we are extremely alike in all our tastes and ways? I have noticed it constantly.'

'And so have I,' said Mr. Tracey. 'If we need any other evidence of the affinity that exists between us than our own consciousness of it, we have a very conclusive proof in the exactness of the two translations of the same passage that we made the other day; have we not?'

'Yes, that was singular. We really have an affinity for each other; and I am going to tell Mildred as soon as she comes home.'

'She would only laugh at us; and when a true affinity exists, it is too sacred a thing to be trifled with. Do you know how rare, how very rare it is to meet with it in this life? In the whole circle of my acquaintance I do not know one married couple that I think is so united.'

Agatha opened wide her eyes. 'Why, that is a dreadful thing to say,' she said. 'And if so many are mismatched in this world, I wonder if they will have to keep so in the next.'

Mr. Tracey, looking her full in the eyes, answered, 'There, there will be neither marrying nor giving in marriage, for we shall be like the angels of God.'

'That passage never seemed to me so beautiful before,' said Agatha. '"For we shall be like the angels of God,"' she repeated.

'There are some women who are very like them here; but no men, unless indeed we take the fallen angels into consideration,' said Mr. Tracey.

There was a pause in the conversation, Agatha

tracing meaningless characters on a scrap of paper with her pen, and Mr. Tracey's eyes following each movement of her beautifully formed white hand. His face showed no emotion, but Agatha's was radiant with her calm, new happiness.

Presently he said, 'I am glad we understand each other so soon, and that you have promised me that faith which is essential to such a friendship as ours must be. Affinity we will not call it, as that word has been so often misused and wrongly interpreted. Do you not remember the Earl of Orrery's lines?—

Friendship of all ties most binds the heart,
And faith in friendship is the nobler part.

You will think I am asking a great deal of you this morning when I tell you I have another request to make of you, Miss Lee.'

Agatha answered without the slightest hesitation, 'I am more than sure there is nothing in this world you could ask me, that I should or could refuse you, Mr. Tracey.'

How full were Agatha's eyes of the tender trust she had given; how exalted and ennobled was the expression of her attractive face! In that moment she looked in very truth the saint they had jestingly called her; for the countenance of no real or pictured saint had ever been transfused with a holier light.

Mr. Tracey closed his eyes and leaned his head upon his hand for a moment, as if dazzled by its glory; but before Agatha had time to wonder at his silence, after her earnest assurance that his request would not be denied, he said,

'I wish permission to call you by your first name,

for it requires constant effort with me not to do so ; and as my wife always calls you Agatha, will you not give me the same privilege, although I have known you well for such a short time ?'

' Though it is but a short time, you do not seem like a new acquaintance, but like a very, very old friend. I was telling Mildred so only this morning. I hope in future you will never call me anything but Agatha.'

' If I entertained the chimera of a pre-existence, I should say we had known each other in another state of being ; for I have the feeling that we are not such new friends as we appear to be. I once had a very vivid dream—many years ago—which made such an impression upon me that to this day the odour of some flowers, snatches of melodies, and certain scenes in nature bring it before me as distinctly as when I dreamed it. The first hour that I saw you, your face had the same effect upon me—your face and your voice ; and now I feel quite sure that you were the heroine of that dream.'

' Pray tell it to me. I should like so much to be a heroine, even in a dream.'

' I cannot now. Should the time ever come when I can, it would give me more pleasure to tell you than it possibly could give you to hear it ; so you must not think that I am merely trying to arouse your curiosity.'

Agatha was still drawing, and finding her sheet covered with the characters she had been tracing, turned it over, and found written on the blank side,

Lift we our eyes to Heaven ! Love greets us thence
Disrobed of all its earthly impotence ;
Even human love—below still doomed to be
Stronger than death, feebler than infancy.

She read it twice, Mr. Tracey regarding her steadily as she did so.

‘How beautiful and how true!’ said Agatha. ‘Is this a fragment from one of your poems, Mr. Tracey?’

‘No, I have read it somewhere, and it so haunted my memory that I wrote it down in a fit of abstraction after coming home from the dinner last evening.’

‘What a stupid dinner it was! Colonel Potten is no favourite of mine, and Count Fosco, as we call Mr. Jenkins, always bores me with his gossip. I wonder that man is so popular: he is invited everywhere solely because he keeps himself posted concerning all that is going on, catering to that universal taste for scandal which distinguishes the especial set that he prides himself upon belonging to. Now, you were charmingly placed, Mr. Tracey, and without doubt found the dinner party a very agreeable one, for everything depends upon how one is seated.’

A quizzical glance escaped Mr. Tracey as he answered, ‘If I had had the arranging of the seats I would not have been placed where I was. Mrs. Rivers, although the embodiment of American cleverness, is not as easy to interest or to lead into conversation as some women whom I have met; but certainly, if there was any want of intellect upon one side of me, it was more than balanced by a superabundance on the other; for Miss Lennox is really a clever woman in the English sense of the word.’

‘How did you like Mrs. Mordaunt — the pretty widow for whom the dinner was given?’

‘I had no opportunity of forming any opinion of her, as I had scarcely had myself presented before Mr.

Rivers joined us, and took me away to show me some rare old books in his possession.'

'Have you not noticed what pleasure some hosts and hostesses take in breaking in upon the *têtes-à-têtes* of their guests, bringing up some third party to introduce, or dragging one away to be introduced just as he has begun thoroughly to enjoy himself: or, what is still worse, if they chance to be stupid, intruding themselves upon you at like inopportune times?'

'Of course I have. Very few people understand the art of entertaining; yet still I must confess to having a great deal of sympathy for the host and hostess, for the reason that still fewer persons thoroughly understand their duty as guests. It really never seems to enter the heads of many that they have anything to do but to amuse themselves.'

'Which is all that should devolve upon a guest, I think: for necessarily, in amusing one's self, one must contribute to the amusement of others. But what has led us so far away from our usual subjects of discourse? Are you not going to finish that romance that I was so interested in? I should like so much to hear the end.'

'It has never had an end, Agatha. God only knows what the end will be.' He spoke slowly and sadly, she still tracing characters with her pen; but when he called her 'Agatha,' she looked up and their eyes met. The radiant glance died out of her own as she encountered the despairing eyes of the man beside her,—despairing and agonised, as if life held no hope for him—no way of escape from the iron that had entered his soul. It was no physical anguish that had kindled that indescribable,

lurid light. Only mental anguish has power to reveal such depths of suffering as Agatha saw in his hopeless eyes. Her strongly sympathetic nature was so worked upon by this sudden revealing of hidden agony, that, not knowing what she did, she seized his hand and carrying it to her lips pressed them passionately against it; then frightened at herself fled from the room.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Mrs. Tracey returned from her walk with Paul Howard she was surprised to find her husband making preparations to leave for New York by the night boat, proposing to her to follow at her leisure. However important the business which had so suddenly summoned him, she seemed to think it might be postponed until the arrival of Agatha's father and aunt, who were daily expected, and accordingly she exerted herself to persuade him to remain. It was of no avail, and before tea was announced his trunk was packed and brought down to the hall. At the last moment there was a little delay in the coming round of the carriage. As they stood around the library table, no longer littered with papers, but arranged as of old with its accustomed books and writing materials, Mr. Tracey said,

‘I want to thank you, Agatha, for all that you have done for me—more than you know. I am afraid that it will never be in my power to return your kindness.’

‘I assure you, Mr. Tracey, that the pleasure of the work repaid me. I have enjoyed every moment spent over our translations as I never enjoyed anything in life before. It is I who am indebted to you, for you have revealed to me my vocation. I shall end in becoming an authoress, I expect.’

‘God forbid !’ he said earnestly.

They heard the carriage approaching. Mr. Tracey made a hurried adieu, and the horse tore over the gravelled drive as if conscious that he had to atone for the groom’s slackness.

Agatha felt a strange tightening at her heart as she went back to her chair by the library table. Mrs. Tracey looked blue, and felt so ; for there was something in her husband’s manner that impressed her with a sense of coming evil.

‘Really, I do not see why Carroll should have hurried off in this mysterious way. There is something more than we know at the bottom of it,’ remarked Mrs. Tracey.

‘I feel sure that he must have some good reason for going, as well as for not telling us why he goes,’ Agatha replied.

‘His eyes had a troubled, anxious expression : did you not notice how unusually grave he looked ?’

‘I think Mr. Tracey always looks grave : but I confess that I did fancy a pained look upon his face, as though he were in doubt or suspense about something ; yet I daresay it was all in our imagination.’

Mrs. Tracey shaded her eyes with her hand, looking downwards, and Agatha, with her head thrown back, looked up at the ceiling. Neither was inclined for conversation. At length Mrs. Tracey broke the silence.

‘Agatha,’ she said, ‘I often wish I were dead.’

‘How can you be so wicked—you, who have so much to live for ?’

A bitter smile passed over Mrs. Tracey’s face.

‘I, who have so much to live for !’ she repeated, enunciating each word separately.

‘Yes, there are few men whom I have ever met who are so fitted to make home charming as your husband is. I cannot conceive why you, of all other women, should wish to die.’

‘Then I will tell you why. Because I am tired of living for duty with nothing to inspire me with strength to bear my cross ; because I am tired of gathering thistles only, when I might have roses as well ; because I long for love, as every woman must who has tasted of the tree of life, but never more than tasted.’

Mrs. Tracey spoke with vehemence, and Agatha looked on with amazement, as she continued,

‘Anything would be better than the life I lead ; death a thousand times better. My husband gives me no confidence, and asks for none. He goes his way, and leaves me to go mine. Is this your idea of happiness in married life ? I might as well be chained to a marble statue.’ Again she covered her face with her hands, and tears trickled through her fingers.

Agatha arose and stood over her, bending to kiss her upon her forehead.

‘You are excited about your husband leaving you so suddenly—unnecessarily excited. You exaggerate the situation. To-morrow you will look at everything in a calmer way, and you will then regret what you have now said.’

Mrs. Tracey made a gesture of impatience, as if she despaired of making Agatha understand her, and wearily clasping her hands, said,

‘Yes, I always regret it whenever any complaint passes my lips. I know that I have no right to complain. You are right ; I shall be calmer to-morrow, and everything will appear in a different light. What busi-

ness have I with a heart? It ought to have withered into ashes long ago.'

'Why, Mildred, how wildly you talk to-night! Don't be so foolish about your husband. He will explain everything that now seems strange when he returns. There is the door-bell! I will say we are engaged ;' and Agatha opened the door leading into the hall to give the order to the servant in passing.

'If it is Paul Howard, I have promised to see him,' said Mrs. Tracey, walking to the glass, and drying the tears with her gossamer handkerchief.

It was he, and Mrs. Tracey joined him in the drawing-room, Agatha asking to be excused. She walked to the window and looked out. There was not a star visible, for the sky was completely overcast with clouds, and the darkness of the night was intense. Her thoughts dwelt but a few moments upon the singularity of Mildred's words ; for they naturally brought to her mind how, but a few short weeks before, she had thought life not so very desirable herself. Now the halo of her new friendship made it seem so lovely, so beautiful. Thinking of her own happiness, her mind soon wandered away from Mildred's rashly uttered and apparently unreasonable complaints. That afternoon, when she had so impulsively kissed Mr. Tracey's hand, she had flown from the room, and going to her chamber, had, weeping tears of humiliation, fallen on her knees and prayed that she might not lose the respect and affection that had become so dear to her, by an act which seemed unmaidenly when the emotion which had called it forth had subsided. It agonised her to think how her intensely sympathetic nature might have been misunderstood. But now she knew that she

had given herself unnecessary anxiety, for when Mr. Tracey had sought her, letter in hand, to inform her that he had received a summons which made his departure that very night necessary, she had stammered out some words of explanation, and he, with the most respectful tenderness in his tones, had replied,

‘Do not pain me by such suspicions as your words imply: do not even finish what you are about to say. I know all that is in your heart now, as I have long known all its generosity and its purity. Where a friendship like ours exists, there must also exist unbounded trust. Let us trust each other implicitly. I could not misunderstand you; and I pray God that I may never give you occasion to distrust me.’

His serious eyes were looking straight into her own, as he said these words; and Agatha felt as though lifted up to the mossy peaks, which in her vision had seemed to touch the stars, as she recognised the same serene eyes that had beamed upon her then. From that moment her heart was at rest. She knew neither doubts nor fears. The friendship, which she had longed for and prayed for, had come to her at last.

She turned from the window, and seated herself by the library table in the chair which Carroll Tracey had always occupied when writing. Leaning back in it, she fell into a reverie. Her eyes were closed, her red lips struck apart, as her heaving breath swayed to and fro the soft, undulating folds of her dress. The wind, rising without, filled the air with its weird whisperings, soothing her to repose; the black darkness of the night seemed to have steeped her very brain; and in fancy there glowed through it in letters of flame the words, ‘There, there will be neither marrying nor giving in

marriage ; for we shall be like the angels of God.' From this dreamy mood she soon fell into a soft and dreamless slumber.

Meantime Carroll Tracey had arrived at the dock just in time to see the boat move off, leaving a chasm which he had but to clear to reach it. Once he would not have hesitated to make the venture : but his life had suddenly grown dear to him, enriched as it was by his new friendship. Making his way back to the point where he had left the carriage, he found it gone ; and wrapping his overcoat more closely around him he prepared to breast the cold wind in the long walk that lay between him and Mr. Lee's villa. It was quite late when he at last arrived ; but lights were still burning in many of the windows. He crossed the lawn, and looked in the library window ; he saw Agatha sleeping in his chair, a flood of light from the chandelier pouring down upon her face, which seemed to him, with its happy, tranquil expression, as if a halo surrounded it, vivid as those that Fra Angelico has left around the heads of his painted saints. Did he also discern there, the one red flame, that shoots from the foreheads of each of those martyrs, that he started back so soon, closing one hand over his eyes as if to shut out the vision ? Recovering himself, he walked to a window of the drawing-room. From between the parted curtains, a stream of light fell full upon him, as, white and motionless, he looked in with eager gaze. It was but for an instant ; and then he opened the sash and stood face to face with his wife, his face blazing with passion, just as Paul Howard closed the door after him that led out on the piazza from the other end of the room.

For one long moment they looked steadily at each

other, and then Mildred dropped back in her chair, and covering her face with both hands, wept.

Carroll Tracey waited until the storm of passion that had agitated him upon his entrance was past, and then asked with forced calmness,

‘What does this mean?’

Mildred’s sobs alone broke the silence, and again he asked,

‘What is the meaning of this scene that I have witnessed?’ Still there was no answer, but thicker came the sobs, and stung by his recollections, he broke out with the accusations that were in his thoughts.

‘I cannot bear this. It is too much,’ cried Mildred. ‘You are unjust. I will tell you all that there is to tell; but no, you would not believe me if I told you the truth. Think what you choose. I will not humiliate myself by an explanation which I know you will refuse to credit.’

‘You cannot humiliate yourself more in my sight than you already have done. I demand the explanation of you, if there is any, of such an unaccountable scene.’ His face was so stern, his tones so determined, that Mildred dared not refuse to answer any longer. Still covering her eyes she said,

‘He arose to go; I arose also. Before I knew what he was doing he caught me around my waist with one arm, and with his other hand held my head back, kissing me over and over on my lips. I could not help it, I could not help it,’ she cried, weeping even more bitterly than before. Mr. Tracey turned and paced the room, his eyes cast down, his brows knit and lowering.

He had been upon the eve of replying, ‘You knew, and I know, that Paul Howard, unprincipled though he

be, would never have dared to take such a liberty had you not given him some encouragement ;' but he had checked himself, remembering how strong a temptation had once come over him to hold to his heart for one moment some one whom that heart held dear, yet from whom he had received no encouragement. He knew not what to say, he knew not what to think even. In the first days of his married life his wife had forfeited his confidence ; and yet, so just and so generous a man had he been, that he had preferred to be wronged himself, rather than to wrong her, after the explanation that she had then given of her seeming want of loyalty.

To and fro he continued to pace the room. Perhaps half an hour or more passed before he again addressed her. Then he approached her, but she shuddered and drew away.

'You called me Messalina,' she said.

'I did not know what I was saying, Mildred. When a man sees his wife in the arms of a libertine, and fancies she is returning his hot kisses, he does not stop to weigh his words. Blackguard ! I wish duelling was permitted.'

Mrs. Tracey leaned forward, uncovering her tear-stained face.

'Carroll,' she said, 'promise me you will not touch him !'

'I make no promises. I would shoot him if I could ; as I cannot, I will horsewhip him.'

'You are talking again without weighing your words,' she answered, with gentle dignity. 'I care very little what befalls him, but I do care about my reputation, for your sake quite as much as for my own. I have never been talked about, and I beg you not to expose me to scandals that would surely be circulated if you were to

have any words with Paul Howard. He would like nothing better than to have you so couple his name with mine.'

'If you knew him to be such a character, why have you allowed him to see so much of you?'

'I do not know why I have,' she answered, again weeping. 'I suppose because I was alone so much. You and Agatha were always occupied with your translations, and I sang with him, and walked with him, without thinking much about him in any way, excepting that he was an agreeable companion.'

Mr. Tracey drew a chair near his wife, and there was a certain degree of tenderness in his looks and tones—a pitying tenderness, as he said,

'I wish to take upon myself the blame of having exposed you to such a scene, while you still hold my honour in your keeping; and also to confess that I have been guilty of moral cowardice in not having sooner offered to release you from all ties to me. A man shrinks from having his married life canvassed by the world, and this it is which has made me unjust to you. I see how wrong I have been, and I am thankful that it is not too late to atone for the error. You are at liberty to apply for a divorce from me on whatever ground you like; I will bear the odium, and you shall be free to marry again. Only for your own sake I warn you not to marry that man whom I saw holding you in his arms to-night. You are young, your beauty has not yet passed its prime; all I ask of you is to make a wiser choice than that man would be, whose loves change as the moon changes. I want your life to be happier than I have been able to make it; for, Mildred, you put it out of my power to be to you the husband that I would have been, had I not

discovered your love for another, and with it such revelations as no love could bear and remain unchanged. I have tried to atone to you as far as I could for the loss of that degree of love which is necessary to insure the complete happiness of married life ; but my own life has shown me that nothing can make up for that loss, and that the marriage tie is but mockery where no marriage of heart and soul exists.'

Mildred, weeping silently, with her handkerchief pressed to her eyes, made no answer.

Mr. Tracey continued, 'Let us always think as kindly of each other as we can. I know how hard and cold I have seemed ; I could not be otherwise. I have been hard and cold with myself. The divorce shall be conducted as privately as is possible. When will you apply for it ?'

'I shall never apply for it. If you wish to be divorced, you must make the application. I shall not oppose it.'

She had ceased weeping, and was looking up straight into his eyes—her tear-stained face lovelier even than that of Rotari's exquisite Magdalene, in which there is such a pathos of grief that those who have once seen it are haunted for ever after by its heart-broken sadness. For a moment or more Carroll Tracey regarded steadily the beautiful face turned towards him, his heart touched by the thoughts that crowded in upon him. Had he without just cause thrown the shadow of his coldness over the life of the woman who now refused to avail herself of the opportunity he had offered her of a legal separation ?

The clatter of a horse's hoofs rang over the gravelled carriage drive, and changed into impatient pawings as

the rider dismounted and rang the bell. Both distinctly heard the words, 'A telegram for Mr. Carroll Tracey,' as the servant opened the door.

Going into the hall he took it from the messenger, and, tearing open the envelope, read it by the light of the hall lamp.

When he returned to the drawing-room, Mildred asked, 'Is anything wrong?' noticing as she spoke the deadly pallor of his face and the sorrow in his eyes.

'No, nothing is wrong that comes from God. I should have been too late, even had I reached the boat. Agnes is dead.' Drawing a letter from his pocket, he opened it, and handed it to her, saying, 'This is the letter that I received this afternoon from her husband.'

Mildred took it from him with trembling hands, and with a face as white as his own stood under the chandelier and read,

'Agnes is worse, and would like to see you as soon as you can make it convenient to come to the city. I do not apprehend any immediate danger, but I am anxious that her every wish shall be gratified; and I beg that you will not allow your feelings towards me to prevent you from coming to my house. I will arrange it so that we shall not meet if you desire, but if you can overlook at this time whatever cause of grievance I have given you in the past, it will not be lost upon

'Your brother-in-law,

'HAROLD GRAHAM.'

Mildred stood motionless, except that her hands were trembling as she read, and her heart beating like a sledge-hammer. She felt as if she were in a dream, and some horrible nightmare had seized hold of her, stifling back

the words of sympathy that were in her heart to say. Meantime Carroll Tracey stood watching her intently, and when she pressed one hand tightly over her heart as if the pain there was more than she could bear, he approached and led her to a seat.

‘I foresee the end. Agnes no longer stands between you, and you shall be free to become his wife,’ he said.

Her answer was but a gesture, but as she turned her head away, and with one hand, palm outwards, deprecatingly shielded her face from him, it was as if she had said, ‘Spare me! spare me! I can bear no more!’

CHAPTER X.

AGATHA, aroused from her slumber by the noise made upon the arrival of the telegram, knew nothing of Mr. Tracey's return ; and supposing Paul Howard to be still in the drawing-room with Mildred, awaited his departure before joining her. She lived over in memory all the incidents of the past weeks in which Carroll Tracey bore a part, dwelling the longest upon their last conversation. Suddenly, remembering the sheet of paper on which she had read the verse which so eloquently embodied her ideas of human friendship, she looked for it under the books that were lying upon the table. It was not there. She drew out one of the drawers in which several sheets lay loosely, some of them written upon. The first that she took up was a poem under the heading,

AFFINITÄT.

Not ours upon Elysian seas to ride,
Wafted by breezes spice-perfumed and soft,
Seeking some harbour where our days may glide
In fond endearments and in converse oft.

Oceans as well might roll between us here—
So wide apart our daily paths must lie ;
Yet time nor distance could I ever fear,
Where souls are knitted in so close a tie.

Is there a haven where our paths will meet,
While o'er us neither clouds nor storms shall lower,
Where, though the moments pass howe'er so fleet,
No shadows haunt them of the parting hour ?

Ah, He who kindled in our hearts this flame—
Pure as upon the vestal virgins' shrines—
Has taught me charity where others blame,
And with this gift my inner life refines.

He will, if faithful unto our dear trust,
So crown our lives with Love's immortal bays,
That chance, nor fate, nor laws both wise and just
Shall mar the pleasure of our peaceful days.

As Agatha read, her heart almost stood still. It was Carroll Tracey's well-known handwriting, but was it a composition, or only a translation? She knew not what to think. Again and again she read the poem, some subtle influence from it stealing deeper and deeper into her heart each time that she read it, until it was to her as though 'her outward form was consumed as by a flash of lightning, and left her soul face to face with his soul;' no longer needing his bodily presence, or the ministry of her own senses, for her mind to communicate with his, because of its 'capability of seizing hold of the imperishable, the eternal' that dwells within. Thus lifted up in her exaltation of soul, above and beyond the world, it was as if heaven opened and revealed itself to her. The paper lay upon the table before her, and folding her hands over it, she raised her eyes, as a saint might have done in some hour of ecstatic devotion.

Later, when Carroll Tracey, after holding a long conversation with his wife, went out upon the piazza to walk off, as far as was possible, his excitement in the open air before going to the hotel, where he had ordered his luggage to be taken from the dock, he gave one more look through the library window as he passed. Memories of that serene, upturned face, of the holy light in the dreaming eyes, of the sweet smile of saintly happiness that lingered about the mouth, went with him to sustain

and bless him in the dark hours that were to try his soul before its worth was tested. The closing of the hall door, followed as it speedily was by sounds of partially suppressed weeping, brought Agatha back to earth again. Supposing it to be Paul Howard who had left, she immediately went to the drawing-room, and there found Mildred in an agony of tears.

‘What is the matter, Mildred?’ she exclaimed. ‘How you do frighten me! Do tell me what is the matter?’ And sitting down beside her, Agatha encircled Mildred’s waist with her arm, and tried to draw her head down upon her shoulder. ‘Has Paul Howard said anything to offend you? I am sure he has. Tell me, Mildred, for pity’s sake tell me.’

‘Oh, Agatha! Agatha! Agatha!’ was her only answer.

‘What has happened? Mildred, try to compose yourself and tell me. You will surely be ill after this.’

‘I wish I were ill. I wish I were dead!’ was her only answer. She was weeping more quietly now, and Agatha, waiting for the moment when, exhausted by her weeping, she should become sufficiently calm to speak with her of her trouble, recalled the history which Carroll Tracey had told her, and felt her suspicions deepening into convictions that he had been speaking of himself. But how could that be possible? Once more Agatha spoke, ‘Do at least tell me that Paul Howard has nothing to do with your trouble, whatever it is.’

‘I wish that I could tell you so,’ she answered, suppressing her sobs, and really struggling to regain her control over herself. ‘I wish that I could, but it was he who has compromised me with Carroll. Tell me, Agatha, what would you have thought of me if you had found

me in Paul Howard's arms when you came into the room ?'

'What would I have thought ? How can I even imagine what I would have thought, when I cannot conceive the possibility of your being in such a situation ? Mildred, what *do* you mean ?' asked Agatha, looking as horrified as she felt.

Long quivering sighs escaped Mildred, as with bent head, and eyes fixed on the carpet, she continued, 'I mean that Carroll found me in Paul Howard's arms ; when too late for the boat he returned here, and that although I told him that I could not help it he did not believe me.' A hard, stoical look had settled upon her face ; while upon Agatha's was an expression of disbelief, as though she could not credit such a statement.

'You could not help it ! Surely, Mildred, you do not know what you are saying. But I am quite sure that, no matter how much appearances may be against you, your husband is too good and too just a man to wrong you by any unworthy suspicions. Do you really mean to say that Paul Howard dared to show you such an insult under my roof ? Tell me how it happened.'

'He got up to go, and when I arose, he suddenly caught me in his arms, and, before I knew what he was doing, he had nearly smothered me with kisses on my mouth. Perhaps it was my fault, for he had been talking to me as he had never talked before, and I was weak enough to listen, and foolish enough to try to reason with him for his folly. Agatha, I daresay even you would scarcely credit me if I were to tell you all that passed between us. You would at least say that I was not true to myself to allow him to say what he did ; but I like him so much, and I felt so sorry for him, and I was

quite sure that I could show him his folly ; and the end is that Carroll and I are going to be divorced.'

'Divorced !' echoed Agatha. 'You cannot be divorced. What God hath joined together man cannot lawfully put asunder, save for one cause ; and you are both true to each other ; so you cannot be divorced.'

'God did not join us together. I married Carroll Tracey, not for love, but to revenge myself upon another. Do you think God has anything to do with such marriages ?'

'Mildred ! how horrible !'

'You may well say, "How horrible !" Yes, I married him from pique, and before the first six months had passed he knew that it was so.'

Agatha remembered the history that he had unfolded to her, and knew now that it was his own. Shocked beyond power of expression, she could hardly restrain herself from withdrawing her hand, which clasped one of Mildred's, but the sad face mutely pleaded for compassion ; and Agatha, touched by its wretchedness, said, 'Poor child ! how could you ever have done such an awful wrong to him, and to yourself ?'

'You may well ask the question. I do not know now how I could have done it ; but I did it remorselessly then, and without any compunction. I loved another, and that one, cool and cautious, weighed me in the balance, and found me wanting in the requisites for a wife that his judgment demanded. He never told me that he loved me, or that he was afraid to trust his happiness to my keeping ; yet I knew it, and, conscious of my influence over him, I thought in the end his love for me would overcome his fears. We were at an old-fashioned rural watering-place, and Carroll Tracey and

his young sister were there. It amused me to see the jealousy that Carroll's attentions awakened, and it flattered me that a man like Carroll should single me out and devote himself to me. All summer long I played one off against the other, and fancied that the one to whom he devoted himself was made use of as I made use of Carroll. One moonlight night a party of us went down to sit upon the rocks as we had often done before. Carroll and I took our seats rather apart from the rest. He whom I loved was sitting with the same young girl, also apart, but nearer us than the others. As low as they were speaking, the murmur of the waves could not drown his voice for my ear, and I heard him ask her to be his wife. I did not hear her answer, but I knew what it was; and my heart ached at the thought that that child, that school-girl, was my rival!—that she would be the wife of the man whom I adored—the man whose unloved wife I would rather have been in those days than to have seen him the husband of another. I had previously done my share of the talking, but after that blow I could not speak. Carroll mistook my silence for sentiment, my abstraction for a tenderer feeling, and became more tender and more full of sentiment than I had ever found him before. He pressed me for some reason for the melancholy mood which had come over me. I answered impetuously, just as I felt at that moment, that I was wretched, tired of life, that I longed to die. When I saw how these declarations affected him, a desperate purpose came over me. So well did I succeed, that when we walked up to the hotel together, I had promised to be his wife. I have always thought that he offered himself to me from pity more than from love; and out of pique I accepted him. Not until our

return to our respective homes were the two engagements announced ; mine to Carroll, and that of his sister Agnes to Harold Graham. Are you tired, Agatha ? for there is more to come, and I want to tell you all.'

‘ No, I am not tired, Mildred ; but you look so white and so weary that I am afraid for you. Had you not better go to bed, and tell me the rest to-morrow ? ’

‘ To-morrow morning we go by the Shore line to New York. Mr. Tracey left his luggage at the Ocean House. He has gone back there for the night, and he is coming early in the morning to take me away. His sister is dead. We got the telegram after his return from the boat, and we are going home for the funeral. Nothing is to be known of our separation until the divorce is applied for.’

She was so unnaturally calm now, that Agatha would willingly have seen the tears flowing again.

‘ I must tell you all now,’ resumed Mildred. ‘ It is a relief to me to be able to speak at last of matters that have never passed my lips before. You already know that we were married and went home to live with Carroll’s father for a time. Agnes was married soon after, and the next summer we were all thrown together at their old country-house—a place out of Boston, which has been in the family for I don’t know how many generations. It is an odd old house, with a wing built on here, and a bay window there, just as each owner fancied, without any pretensions to architecture of any sort ; and one of those bay windows cost me the happiness of my life, for I do believe that I could in time have made myself dear to Carroll, and that he would have been all in all to me.’

Mildred paused, shading her eyes with her hand as

she recalled the events in the connection that she desired to narrate them. Agatha listened in almost breathless attention.

‘How plainly I can see the room! the worn, home-made, striped carpet, with the straight-backed chairs, the tall polished andirons, holding boughs of asparagus instead of the logs that blazed upon them in cold days; the muslin curtains that curtained off the great bay window, swaying to and fro in the air that swept in from beds of jonquils and moss-pinks, and thickets of honeysuckle. Ah, Agatha! since that day it has taken only the odour of those flowers to make me ill! But I have not told you how it all came about. Who is it that has said “Face-joy is a costly mask to wear?” I have worn mine so well that no one dreamed of the aching heart that I always carried in my bosom—aching, not more with a sense of my own wretchedness, than with remorse for the wrong I had done my husband. To atone as far as possible for this wrong I had resolved never to trust myself alone in the presence of the man whom I still loved—almost as passionately as in the days of my girlhood. No, I will not say “the man,” for it was not he, as he disclosed himself to me on that day; it was the ideal that I had raised an altar to in my heart. So sedulously did I avoid Harold Graham, that Agnes noticed it, and called me to account for my rudeness; but she did it in such a kind, sisterly way, that I felt more affection for her than I had ever felt before. The daily penance that I underwent schooled me at last into a calm confidence in myself, and made me in time fearless as to the future, as far as any exposure of my real feelings was concerned. I was like one dwelling in green vineyards that had spread themselves over the side of a

volcano ; heedless of the molten lava that bubbled and boiled beneath, and that at any moment might rend the earth under the feet and swallow up all that was lovely, leaving nothing but desolation. By no look nor word had I ever betrayed to Harold that he was still dear to me ; although not a day passed that did not bring me some experience which contributed to show me that the love which he gave to Agnes was as different to that which he felt for me, as a little meadow streamlet differs from the mountain torrent that carries all before it.'

Again Mildred paused, and Agatha lifting her hand to her lips and kissing it, said,

' What a poetical nature you have ! I feel as though I were only beginning to know and understand you. How dreadful that anything should have come between you and Carroll, when you were made for each other !'

' No, we were not made for each other. I am sure of that. Two poetical temperaments—that is, two imaginative, idealising natures—ought never to be brought together in marriage. If one has refined and exalted sense, the other should possess common sense, so that one may balance the other ; or I am sure their children would be lunatics, to say nothing of the weariness and satiety that like wedded to like always brings. I know that I could no more make Carroll happy than you could, for, you see, we, all three of us, are too much alike.'

' But like attracts like,' said Agatha, wishing in her heart that Mildred would not make so many digressions.

' In friendship, yes ; in love, counterparts only make a perfect whole. Carroll and I were matched, not mated, or else he would have forgiven what there was to forgive, and grown to love me in time. As for me,

I have so longed for love, that had but a dog loved me, I could have loved him in return. It has been well said that to man love is an amusement, but to woman a necessity. It is my life. Do you fancy that I have had no temptations in these long years in which he has been as indifferent to me as if I were an image of marble, instead of flesh and blood? But no, I will not do myself the injustice to say that I have been tempted, for I never have for one moment forgotten that I belonged to another and not to myself; though sometimes I have wished that I could forget it.'

'Poor Mildred! But will you not tell me what happened that morning in the old country-house?'

'Where was I? I forget. Ah, I was telling you that I knew what an unsatisfied life Harold led—that I saw what a dear price he had paid for having suffered his caution to triumph over his love. I saw also that, like myself, it was duty alone that enabled him to maintain the reserve which he had adopted. Agnes had one of those weak, clinging natures which some men idolise in a woman, and others soon weary of. She all but worshipped him; and more than once I felt embarrassed by his want of deference to her wishes, and his undue though formal deference to mine. I saw with pain that his nature in no way harmonised with hers: while each day made her dearer to me because of her amiability—her thoughtful consideration for others. How little she dreamed why it was that I so often refused her request to sing; how unamiable and disengaging she must have thought me! But, Agatha, I was afraid of myself. The very songs she asked me for were those I had sung again and again with her husband; and not a word but was associated with some

memory of him. Our favourite lounging place—Agnes' and mine—was this deep oriel window that I have told you of ; it was shut off from the gloomy wainscoted parlour by thickly embroidered muslin curtains. This little alcove was always light, notwithstanding the glass was stained and great matted branches of honeysuckle fell over the upper part of it. We kept our books there, our writing-desks, and our work-baskets ; and our mornings were engaged with one or the other, while Carroll and Harold were off shooting, fishing, or in some way amusing themselves. In the afternoons we all rode or drove together, or took long rambles through the woods. One afternoon I found myself when walking left behind, as I thought ; and glad to be alone, I sat down on a mossy log, thinking I would wait for their return, as I did not feel in the mood of taking a longer walk. But I had scarcely thrown off my hat when I heard the crackling of steps over the dried pine-needles that carpeted the ground. I turned my head, and saw Harold Graham approaching. There was no restraint in his manner now, as he threw himself down in front of me. Looking up into my face he said abruptly, without preface of any kind, " You know what is in my heart, and I know what is in yours. We cannot deceive each other, though we may deceive all the world beside." I was so utterly astounded that I could not answer. He continued, " If the day ever comes that you love me any less I will kill you." He was looking straight into my eyes, his own so luminous with a strange light that they held mine as if a serpent had charmed me.

" You will kill me ? " I said at last. " Possibly that is the most merciful thing that you could do ; " and as

I said these words I thought how sweet death would be to come by his hands, and wished that it might come then and there. But in the same instant I remembered my marriage vow, and closing my eyes I tried to shut out that magnetic gaze, which was sending electric waves from my head to my feet, and at the same time taking all strength out of me, so that I was powerless to rise. I knew in that moment how the bird feels that drops into the jaws of the boa-constrictor. "Why do you close your eyes, and shut me out of heaven, in these few brief moments that we are alone together?" he asked. I did not answer. "You dare not look at me!" he said, in a tone of defiance. I replied, "You are right. I dare not."

'How terribly imprudent in you to admit that, Mildred!' exclaimed Agatha. 'You ought to have repelled him at once, and asserted your—'

'I am telling you what I did do—not what I ought to have done,' replied Mildred. 'It is always easy to see how one might have been a heroine, or a saint even, after the opportunity has passed; but it takes a philosopher to always see what one ought to do, and a stoic to do it, when every pulse in your body is going wrong.'

'Stoics do not have any pulses that go wrong, I suppose,' said Agatha. 'Now you ought to have—'

'Don't tell me what I ought to have done: please don't,' pleaded Mildred. 'I know only too well what I ought to have done. But it was destiny that made me do as I did. It is easy for you to say that I ought to have done this or that, or that you would have done thus or so, had you been in my place: but, Agatha, no one can judge for another, and no one knows what one would do unless placed in precisely the same cir-

cumstances. Judged we may be by each other, but God who alone sees the heart and knows all that goes to make up the strength of the temptation to do wrong instead of right—He alone can pass righteous judgment. Tell me, Agatha, did the thought ever cross your mind, that not Satan, but God, leads us into temptation, and that He does so lead us in order that we may attain greater heights than we could ever reach if it were not for such stepping-stones that take us upward ?'

'I do not think that either God or Satan tempts us,' answered Agatha. 'I think it is the evil in our own hearts, and that if we yield to it, it gains power and becomes our master; and that if we resist it, good in us grows stronger and dominates over the evil.'

'But our Saviour prayed, "Lead us not into temptation ?"'

'I never thought of that before; and yet the apostle James says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God." My favourite passage concerning temptation is in these words of St. Paul, "God will not suffer ye to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape."

'And that promise was literally fulfilled in my case, for just when I was the most powerless, the weakest, when the very next moment I might have admitted something that all my life I would have regretted, I saw Carroll and Agnes approaching. Harold had said a great deal more; but I had not spoken after those words, "I dare not." We all walked home together. I had never seen Harold in such a wild, reckless mood as he was in for the rest of that day and evening, and I had never seen him so dangerously handsome before.

I tried to keep my eyes from him ; but every now and then, he would address to me a question that obliged me to raise my eyes to his ; for of all guilty-looking creatures, that one who cannot encounter the eyes of the questioner in replying is the most to be pitied ; and each time his look sent through me such thrills as I never felt before. That night I said to Carroll, “ I want to go away from here. The air or something does not agree with me.” He replied, that he had never seen me looking better, and that he had hoped I would like the quiet of the country as much as he did, for that the noisy gaiety of a watering-place was very distasteful to him. What could I do ? I said nothing more, and waited for a better opportunity, hoping that chance would befriend me : for I do believe in chance, or destiny, or Providence, or whatever you choose to call it.’

“ ‘Chance comes from Providence, and man must mould it to his own design,’ ” quoted Agatha.

Mildred shook her head. ‘ No, my design and my wish was to get away without any betrayal to Carroll or Agnes of Harold’s and my unhappy love for each other. Listen, until I tell you what chance did for me ; or rather, come to think of it, what chance would have done for me, had I not attempted to mould it to my own designs. The next afternoon our horses were brought around, all of them needing exercise, and Carroll and I started off, when Agnes called after us that we were pairing off together as usual, like a second edition of Adam and Eve, and asked Carroll to ride with her and let Harold ride with me. Had I accepted that arrangement, all would have been well, for I was in a mood to put an end to his madness ; but I quietly said to Carroll that I had my reasons for preferring to

ride with him ; and he shouted back to his sister that he felt like monopolising me. As we rode off he said, " You do not like your brother-in-law." It was true that I did not like him, for I loved him, and so I wickedly prevaricated and said that I did not *like* him. If I had only summoned courage then to tell the truth ; but of what use is it to say if I had done this, or done that, when even in evil I believe that it is God who worketh in us to will and do of His own good pleasure ? What has been, and is, was to be. We returned just at nightfall, all coming in together ; for they had joined us before we had reached the grounds ; and when we had dismounted Carroll and Harold went around to the stable, Agnes went up to her room, and I sat down in my habit at the piano, my heart so full of its pent-up torture that I had to sing. I am sure that I sang then as I never sang before—as I never have since. I almost forgot my misery as I sang song after song that came to me without any conscious selection of my own. I had just finished that exquisite morceau from " Robert le Diable," " Robert toi que j'aime," when I felt a presence beside me. I had heard no sound, no footfall, for there was no matting on the parlour floor, as on the others, but a carpet of soft wool. I knew, as a clairvoyant knows, who it was that stood close by me—so close that presently I heard the breath come and go. My fingers trembled over the keys ; my firm elastic touch had gone ; my song ended in a wail ; and angry with myself that it was so, I pressed both my hands over my face and burst into tears. He crossed the room, closed the door, and returning, stood again at my side. " Mildred ! let me see your face ; look at me. Why do you persist in avoiding me now that we

both know what we are to each other? You shall listen to me, if you will not look at me," he said, holding me down on my seat by both hands pressed on my shoulders, for I had started to fly from the room. To fly from him! I tell you Agatha from the moment that his hands touched me I lost all my strength again. I could not move. I daresay you do not believe in animal magnetism, but I do. When he found that I offered no farther resistance, he dropped upon one knee, and passed his arm around my waist. I made no resistance, nor should I if he had taken out a knife to kill me, as he had threatened to do. He continued, "If I try to keep my love for you shut up in my heart any longer, it will eat its way through. You *must* listen to me. What an awful mistake we have both made! Tell me that you forgive the cold heartlessness which made me follow judgment instead of passion!" I did not answer; my heart felt as if it were floating in a sea of flame, and I breathed as if the flames were stifling me at first; then I grew quite calm in an inexplicable sense of happiness that came over me, and I wished that I might die then and there, before it passed, as I knew it would when he should take his hands away. Agatha, I am talking to you as if I were talking to my own soul, for I have had all these memories to bear so long alone, that I really think I will lose my reason if I try to keep them to myself any longer.'

Agatha pressed Mildred's hand which she was still holding, but she did not speak. These were strange revelations for one whose life had been so void of passionate love as Agatha's had been. Mildred continued, "What a heaven have I shut myself out from!" he said; his face so near to mine that I felt his breath on my

cheeks. "Why did you lead me to think that you loved another, when now I know so well that you have never loved any man but me? How have I watched every look that you gave your husband; how have I listened to every inflection of your voice in speaking to him! A sister might give the same. Had it been otherwise, I believe, in my insane jealousy, I would have stabbed you both. But I remembered how different were the glances and the tones that had made my pulses thrill, and my veins run with fire. Mildred! did God ever mean to make two of His creatures drag out such lives of misery as ours would be if spent apart from each other? Must the laws of men separate us for ever? or will you give up the world for me, who would give up heaven for you, and go with me to some foreign land where we can be to each other all that our hearts claim? If we stay here, we shall daily have to face tortures that will make us pray for death." I heard him to the end, and with one of those sudden revulsions of feeling which sometimes we read of, but which seem unnatural and improbable, I felt all my composure returning, while my heart seemed frozen within me by his base proposal. I shook myself from his hold and answered, "As I prayed for death, when I heard you offer yourself to Agnes. Carroll Tracey showed me the compassion which your less generous nature withheld; for fancying he had occasioned my misery he offered me his hand, and I accepted it; but not to wrong him as you would now tempt me to do. I have loved you as passionately as ever a man was loved; but your unworthiness, as it stands revealed to me now, has accomplished what nothing else could ever have done. I love you no longer. I pity the cold, calculating nature which kept you from declaring yourself to me,

when the happiness of both our lives hung upon that declaration ; and I pity still more the poor wife whom you would have sacrificed had I been as ready to forget my duties as you have been to forget yours." This is as near as it is possible to repeat what passed between us after so long a time, though I have lived over it so often in memory that the scene is to me almost as if it were a thing of the present. I walked from the piano straight out of the room to my chamber. Carroll was there. The two had come in together, and Harold had seen him go up, before coming in to insult me with his diabolical proposition. For the first time in my life I went to my husband, and embraced him, feeling as though I was more worthy of his noble nature than I had ever been before, and that, with God's help, I would be still more so. He held me very tenderly to his heart, and kissed me on my lips, again and again. It was the last time he ever kissed me. Since that night we have lived apart, and only in name have we been husband and wife, for there was a dreadful *dénouement*. When the tea was announced Agnes was nowhere to be found. We called her, searched the grounds for her ; but all in vain, until at last I drew aside the curtains of the oriel window, and there she lay, across a divan, with her head down, to all appearance dead. We sent for the physician, who arrived before our simple remedies had been of any use in bringing her back to consciousness. She became conscious only to rave fearfully of all she had seen and overheard, that had passed between her husband and myself. Unfortunately for me she had fallen into her swoon before hearing my answer, and of course, she regarded me as the author of all her trouble. From this attack of brain-fever, she recovered, only to be an invalid for the rest of

her days, and now, God has most mercifully taken her, where I wish I could follow.' Mildred locked her hands together as she spoke, her dry eyes, and the rigidly set muscles of her mouth but too plainly speaking to Agatha of the dull despair in her heart.

'Was Harold Graham so little of a man that he did not come forward and tell the truth?' asked Agatha.

'Oh no, he took everything upon himself—said that he only was to blame. I never knew how much or how little my husband believed, for he never spoke to me upon the subject, excepting once. Then he asked me if I had loved Harold when I married him, and of course I told him the truth. That time I offered no explanations, for I did not wish to accuse Harold, who had so generously exonerated me; besides, I knew that in my heart I had been untrue to my husband, and I felt too much remorse to attempt to justify myself. Now it is different; I have never for one instant since that time been untrue to him in word or thought, and I did try to justify myself; but he did not believe what I told him, and even you, Agatha, did not give entire credence to my statement. I saw it in your eyes.'

'How can you say so, Mildred? You do me great injustice. Perhaps at first I did not quite comprehend how Paul Howard could have held you in his arms if you had made resistance; but I do now, and no one could doubt you, least of all your husband, who must see how true you have been to him through these long years in which you have suffered so fearfully through the reckless folly of your girlhood. Now do let me persuade you to go to bed, and to-morrow morning when Mr. Tracey comes, all will be made right, I feel sure of it. If you are already so much dearer to me because of what you

have told me, think how much more he will love you when he knows all.' Mildred threw back her head defiantly, saying, 'It is too late. He said words to me last night that I can never forget. It takes a great deal of love to close such wounds as his words made ; and you must not forget that we have never professed to love each other. Besides, he gave me such a glimpse of his own sufferings, from our want of congeniality, that I am fully as anxious now to set him free as he is to be so.'

'But Mildred, you said yourself that you could love a dog even, so thirsty was your heart for love.'

'I did not say I could love a dog that did not love me, and Carroll has never loved me ; any tenderness he has shown me has been from pity, not from love. I have but one thing to live for, and that is to help him to be free as soon as possible. My death would be the best way, but people as wretched as I am never die until they have reached the age of Methuselah.'

'No divorce would make him free to marry again,' said Agatha. 'Our Saviour acknowledges but one lawful reason for divorce, and that does not exist between you.'

'I do not understand,' replied Mildred.

'Why, although you may not have been true to each other in the spirit of the law, if you have in the letter, you cannot be divorced, so that either of you can marry again,' continued Agatha, 'according to my idea of divorce, which is the Scripture one, I am sure. I would never marry a man so divorced, and I am sure you would not think of marrying again, even if you were separated from your husband. If we are at liberty to say which of our Saviour's teachings we will call truth,

and which error, we are no followers of His. But Mildred, it is after midnight, and you must go to bed.'

There was no sleep for either that night. Agatha thought over all that Mildred had told her. Never before had she heard of such experiences in real life, and never before had she felt so much charity for the erring. When morning came, Mildred found herself unable to lift her head from her pillow, for the throbbing headache that had attacked her, almost blinding her with severe neuralgic pain. She begged to have all light shut out from the room, and be left alone.

When Mr. Tracey came to take her to the train, Agatha met him, and told him how impossible it would be for Mildred to travel, asking his consent that she might stay with her for the two weeks that she was to remain in Newport. Mr. Tracey was quite willing, and it was so arranged.

CHAPTER XI.

MILDRED was in bed for several days, and for several more she did not go down stairs. Agatha had many long conversations with her ; and each day that passed made them dearer to each other. Mr. Tracey wrote that he had put everything under way for the divorce as privately as possible, and would avoid all unnecessary publicity. At length the day was fixed for their return to New York, and Agatha went out to pay her last calls upon those of her acquaintances who were to remain in Newport all winter. Mildred was in the music-room, when Paul Howard entered without being announced. His face showed traces of the strong excitement that he was endeavouring to control and keep under. His free manners and rollicking ways were entirely laid aside, and approaching Mildred with the greatest deference he said,

‘I am fortunate in finding you alone.’

Mildred did not speak. Save that she breathed heavier, and that a flush crept over her face, only to leave it paler than before, there was no sign that she even knew of his presence ; for although she had raised her eyes upon his entrance, they had fallen again as soon as she had recognised him.

‘How anxious I have been about you !’ he continued ; ‘I had to go to New York last week, and I only returned

yesterday. I came at once to see you, but was refused. Just now I saw Miss Lee's coupé turning on to the avenue, and I made another attempt, in which chance has favoured me. Have you not one word of welcome for me ?'

'I have no words of welcome for anyone, certainly not for you, Mr. Howard,' she answered.

'Mildred ! Mildred ! every word that you say in these freezing tones goes through my heart like steel. What is my sin ? Loving you more than ever a woman was loved in this world, that is my offence !'

'An offence, which, as the wife of another, I never can, and never will forgive,' she replied, raising her eyes, and meeting the smouldering glow of passion in his.

'The unloved, unhappy wife of another,' he said with emphasis.

'Who dares say I am not a happy wife ?' she asked.

'The world,' he answered.

'Go and tell the world that my husband is a king among men, and that it is happiness enough for me to be his wife, even if I am an unloved one.'

'You are not speaking the truth. If you had been a happy wife, do you fancy that I would have followed you as I have from place to place since I left the army ? You are not happy, nor can you ever know what love is, as the wife of a man who doles out to you a cold affection, such as the followers of Plato might enjoy, but not you, Mildred ! Heavens, how happy I should make you !'

'How miserable you *have* made me,' she said. 'Have you no apology to offer ? Do you feel no regret for what you have done ?'

‘Regret? no ; what I did I would do over again if I had the opportunity.’

‘Have you no fear of God ; none of a hereafter?’ she asked.

‘There can be no worse hell than it is to me to know that you belong to another. If you were like other women whom I have loved, you ——’

‘Other women whom you have loved !’ repeated Mildred. ‘Pray tell me how many scores of women you have loved.’

‘More than I can count ; but you, you have been, and are, the passion of my life. Had you not told me that if I ever made you untrue even in thought to your husband you would take your own life, I would not have spared you as I have.’

‘You, spared me !’ exclaimed Mildred, shaking off his hand which he had laid on her shoulder. ‘Do you know what you are saying ? Good God ! what have I ever done that you should dare to say such words to me, that you should hold me in such light respect ?’

‘I do not respect the angels in heaven more than I do you. Love makes me bold, and my knowledge that you do love me although you try to hide it from me. Hopeless love makes me desperate.’

‘If you know that I love you in return with that kind of love which you offer me, why do you call your love hopeless ? That should satisfy you, and keep you from desperation.’

‘Was there ever a thirsty man who was satisfied by seeing within his reach a fountain gushing over that he was forbidden to touch ? Be merciful ; you will do your husband no wrong. It is he who has wronged you every hour that you have been his wife. Listen to me. Society’s

laws are not God's laws. He never intended that two who love each other should be kept apart, because one of them had committed the mistake of marrying where there was neither congeniality nor love. Life is too short to waste in such a joyless existence. Be merciful ; let me hear your dear lips say what your eyes have so often told me of late. It was your unsatisfied soul that looked out of those eyes into mine, and drew me to you by the irresistible laws of nature. I swear to you, my darling, that all I ask of you is love. Only feed my hunger with your love, only let me hold this precious hand, unresisted, and I shall ask nothing more.'

Mildred's face wore an abstracted look, as with her eyes bent upon the carpet, and her chin resting in the hollow of her hand, she listened to him ; making no attempt to interrupt him, and no movement, excepting when he had endeavoured to touch her hand, which she then quickly withdrew.

'Is this all that you have to say ?' she asked, when he had finished speaking.

'No ; I have a great deal more to say. All time would be too short to say *all* that I have to say. But why are you so changed to-day ? Why are you so hard and cold and unfeeling ?'

'I would have told you why, had you come to talk with me as the friend that I once considered you—had you even expressed any regret for the outrage that you committed in holding me in your arms, and kissing me as you did when I was powerless to prevent you. I thought only schoolboys cared for kisses that were gained by force—that gentlemen only prized such favours when they were willingly yielded. As you have no regret to express, no apology to make, I desire that you

should relieve me of your presence, and that after this we only meet as strangers.'

'Am I nothing to you, then, that you can be angry with me for such a trifle?'

'I do not call it a trifle. I belong to another; and do you think that it is but a trifle to me, when I find myself in the arms of anyone save in his to whom I belong? It is the first time in my life that any man, other than my husband, has so held me. Whatever regard I may have had for you in the past, it is all gone now. It is——'

'Don't say such words to me. Our love is too deep to die from one wound.'

'Do not interrupt me, if you please. I listened to you, and now I have several things to say before we part, to meet as strangers whenever and wherever we next meet. I do not pretend to deny that I have fully appreciated your friendship, and that I loved to think it would be an enduring one; but you have destroyed all that. It is always so with me. No matter how much I may care for anyone, man or woman, when I find them capable of acts that they would scorn did they possess the souls with which I have endowed them, I lose my love; but I deny ever having loved you as you think that I have loved you; I deny that you have ever spared me in any way. You took a brutal advantage of me in a moment when I was under the spell of music, the power of which you well know; and, although you have expressed no penitence, no regret, I——'

'How can I express what I do not feel?' he said.

'You ought to feel it; and possibly, when you know what suffering you have brought to me, you may feel it. When you left me by one door that night my husband

entered by another; but not before he had seen me in your arms as he passed by the window.'

Paul Howard started forward, 'Good God, Mildred! was this then the cause of your illness?'

'Yes, my illness resulted from the painful scene that I went through with my husband that night; but more than my illness is another result that you have yet to hear. We are to be divorced.'

'Divorced!' he exclaimed. 'Then you will yet be mine. No one shall rob me of you now, Mildred.' He left his chair, and stood beside her.

She looked up into his face. The tenderness which overflowed his eyes no longer possessed any danger for her. With perfect coolness she replied,

'You cannot be robbed of that which you have never possessed. Were I ten times divorced I would never be yours. You boasted that you had spared me in the past. All that I ask of you is to spare me in the future—to spare me from any declarations of a passion, the memory of which will always be a humiliation to me!' She arose and crossed the room to the bell-spring, which, at her touch, soon brought a servant's footsteps within sound.

'You cannot be so cruel,' was all that he had time to utter before the servant appeared.

'Will you send my maid to me, please?' she said to the man, who left to execute the order. When the door had closed, she walked to the mantelpiece, and stood leaning against it, awaiting Paul Howard's departure.

He approached her. 'You will be sorry some day that you have been so harsh to me, Mildred. I will wait until that time comes; and now, at least, tell me before

I go that you forgive me for having offended you through too much love !'

'If there had been more love there would have been more respect and nothing for me to forgive ; but I do forgive you, as I hope for forgiveness myself.'

'Then if you forgive me, say that we shall meet as friends and not as strangers when next we meet.'

Mildred hesitated for a moment, and then said with a continuation of that unbroken calmness that had characterised her through the interview,

'We will meet as friends when we do meet so long as you make no other claims upon me than those of friendship.'

At that moment the maid entered, and Paul Howard left the room and the house. As he strode over the lawn, in no enviable frame of mind, he cursed his stars that by one rash act he had lost the vantage ground which up to that time he had fancied that he had gained.

'It is plain to be seen that all is up between Mrs. Carroll Tracey and you,' said Colonel Potten that evening as they sat over their dessert together. 'You have quarrelled, I see.'

'I do not know what has put that into your head. We have parted friends.'

“Friendship full oft doth ripen into love,” quoted Colonel Potten.

'But in this instance love has ripened into friendship, I am afraid,' answered Howard.

'Now, there *is* some mischief going on. I am sure of that, when you throw out such blinds. No elopement while you are under my roof. "Honour among thieves," you know.'

‘Let me tell you that you do not know Mrs. Carroll Tracey ; and for the matter of that, I did not until to-day. She is the first woman I have ever met who made me feel like a fool. I don’t mind telling you, Potten, but, to quote your own words, “ Honour among thieves,” you know.’

‘Whatever you say to me is as safe as if you had only thought it,’ he answered.

‘Well, Mr. and Mrs. Tracey are to be divorced, and on the strength of the information, I offered myself and was refused point blank. I have not got over the stunned sensation that I experienced yet.’

‘Offered yourself? What do you mean—for a husband or a lover?’

Howard put his hand up to the back of his head, and concentrating his gaze as if he were looking at something in the distance, said,

‘Upon my word, I don’t think that I said anything about marriage. Why, of course that’s just what’s the matter.’

‘But then you would see her in heaven first before you would marry her. Isn’t that what you told me?’

‘If I did, I did not mean what I was saying. She would make this earth a heaven for me if she would marry me. She is the first woman, and the only woman, I have ever seen whom I wished to marry ; or who could have tempted me into an elopement.’

‘How about Miss Penn? It certainly is not so long ago that you had that little affair with her that you can have forgotten how sorely you were tempted then.’

‘Not to marry her, by a long shot. She tempted me just as she tempts every man that she flirts with. That girl is the deepest for her years that I ever came across.

I believe, upon my soul, that she is only marrying Atherton to give her more freedom. She can lead a man to the devil as coolly and as deliberately as — ’

‘ As some men can lead a woman,’ interrupted Colonel Potten. ‘ She may meet her match some day.’

Paul Howard lighted his cigar and gave himself up to his reflections. Colonel Potten took his New York journal to the light and read as he smoked. For an hour or more there was nothing said ; then Colonel Potten looked up, and saw Howard leaning back in his chair with a dark frown on his brow, and an evil light in his eyes.

‘ You are the image of an engraving of Satan that I have seen somewhere,’ remarked Colonel Potten.

‘ So I have been told before. I am getting used to the compliment.’

‘ Well, it *is* a compliment. Satan, you know, is said to represent unprincipled intellect.’

‘ It is enough to make a devil of a man to find everything as topsy-turvy as it is in this world. I daresay Lucifer himself would have been all right, if something had not gone wrong in which a woman was concerned.’

‘ Most of us find things all right as long as we have our own way, but when we are crossed, the Lucifer in us generally rises. You have no reason to complain. “ Everything comes to those who know how to wait.” Give the little woman time, and if you do not fall in love with some fresh face, and continue seriously to wish to marry Mrs. Tracey after she is divorced, the chances are all in your favour.’

‘ I am not so sure of that. Since I have been sitting here, I have recalled a story that I once heard about some affair between Carroll Tracey and his brother-in-

law, that had been hushed up. You know his sister died last week ; and if there was anything, as I have heard it intimated, between Graham and Mrs. Tracey, why it's all up with me, you see. When Tracey gets his divorce, she'll marry Graham.'

'All the better for you, and for her too,' answered Colonel Potten. 'But if she has had an affair with Graham, the chances are that they neither of them care a button for each other now.'

'What do you mean ?' said Howard, starting to his feet, his brows set and a demoniacal light flashing from his eyes. 'If you dare to speak of her in that way ! If—'

'Come, come ; don't get so excited. How could I know that I was touching a sore spot ? Let me advise you, if you have so much sensitiveness on that score, never to marry a divorced woman.'

'I tell you, if every relative I have in the world, and every friend that I possess, warn me not to marry Mrs. Tracey, I will marry her all the same, if she will have me, when her husband gets the divorce.'

'What is the ground on which he applies for it ?' asked Colonel Potten.

'I do not know. Incompatibility of temperament, I suppose. Good heavens ! It is always so with these literary men. They do not deserve to have wives. I know I am a worthless, lazy, good-for-nothing fellow, but with such a woman for a wife, you would see what I would become !'

'Every man makes his own character,' said Colonel Potten.

'If there is a destiny that shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we will, we do not make our characters our-

selves. It is the controlling power of circumstances, the influences that surround us, which make us what we are,' replied Howard.

'Not if a man has been trained to discipline himself; that's what gives strength to a character, and helps him to control circumstances, instead of his being controlled by them. No wife is going to keep you right. With your fickle disposition, as soon as you come in possession of the bauble you cry for, it will lose its value. I hate to see a man, possessing such brilliant talents as you, fritter his life away for want of this same self-discipline. If you but gave the time to your studies, and your clients, that you devote to running after new faces, you could be the first lawyer in New York. But as it is, the firm of "Mortimer and Howard" will probably never be heard of as connected with any cases of importance.'

'By the way, I forgot to tell you that Mortimer writes me he has a new client. He does not give his name. By Jove!' suddenly springing to his feet from the lounge where he had thrown himself, 'I'll wager a dozen of Metternich that he is Carroll Tracey. An affair to be conducted with great secrecy, kept out of the papers, and all that. Of course it is Tracey's divorce. You know Mortimer is a cousin of your "Saint Agatha."'

'Don't say *my* Saint Agatha. If all that you have told me is true, she will marry Tracey when he gets his divorce.'

'Well, I have been stupid—thinking so much of myself that it never entered my head what he was after. Of course, that explains it all. This raises my hopes again;' and throwing off his gloom, he broke out into a merry trill, gliding into a chansonette, and ending with

the first verse of the song, 'She is mine, she is mine,' which of late had seemed to be forgotten.

'Yes, it is all settled now,' he said, as he ended the verse. 'Carroll Tracey and Saint Agatha, Mildred and I; and who is there for you, old fellow? Come, now be amiable for once in your life, and offer yourself to that charming Miss Lennox, who had no eyes nor ears for anyone but you at Mrs. Rivers's dinner.'

'What! that old maid? why, she is thirty years old at least.'

'And how old are you, pray tell? You have reached the age of discretion, and discretion tells a man of your age not to marry *a girl* if he wishes companionship of mind as well as full appreciation of himself and—'

'Good for you,' broke in Colonel Potten. 'That is about the first sage remark I ever heard you make. But don't trouble your head about me. I shall never marry again.'

'It seems to me that you do not know your own mind. Why, it is not six months since you told me that you had made up your mind that you would. I thought you would offer yourself to Miss Lee. I did, upon my honour.'

'What an insane idea! If I ever should be such a fool as to marry again, I shall marry a woman, if I know myself, and not an icicle.' Adroitly turning the conversation, he added, 'I must confess that I did not think *you* were a marrying man; certainly, not before you were thirty, did I expect you to fall into the harness of a Benedick.'

A hearty and prolonged laugh answered this last remark as if he himself were struck with the ludicrousness of the idea. 'Paul Howard a married man!' he found

breath at last to say. ‘The very thought is absurd ; but that is the way one after another of us disappear out of the procession of bachelors that feast the eyes and gladden the hearts of the fair candidates for matrimony, and the she-dragons who spread their nets for us with the tempting bait.’

‘Take care how you speak of prospective mothers-in-law. You know it takes a rash man to defy instead of propitiating the powers of evil. What witty Frenchman said that there are three evils in this world from which there is no escaping—sin, sorrow, and a mother-in-law ?’

‘I am sure I do not know ; but again my luck is in the ascendant, for Mildred has no mother.’

‘A settled thing, your marriage with her, is it ?’

‘Yes, as far as I am concerned, it is all settled. But you know, “Man proposes, and woman disposes,” is the new rendering of “L’homme propose, et Dieu dispose.”’

‘A very good one for this especial case. Well, you have my best wishes for whatever is best for you. I daresay there is some truth in the saying, “Love makes or mars a man,” but, however things go with you, be man enough to get out of life what it owes you.’

‘I have managed to do that, so far ; but then, I have been easier to satisfy than I shall be in the future, now that I know what perfection in a woman is, for the first time in my life.’

‘The first time in your life, eh ? Now remember what I tell you, for I am older than you are in many things ; it is not the last time that you will fancy a woman perfection itself, but if you ever do really find one, don’t trust her. If I thought Mrs. Tracey answered to that description, I would counsel you to flee from her

as from Satan himself. No ; give me "a creature not too good for human nature's daily food." Besides, saints and sinners never fraternise well together. I like a cross between an amiable woman and one who is "*coiffée de son opinion*" yes, and *chausée* also, as Miss Lennox is.'

' But of all descriptions of women, I like sanctimonious ones least—the rigidly virtuous, you know, who, never having known a temptation themselves, sit in judgment upon those who have been tempted and who have done better, perhaps, than they would had they been exposed to the same. There's your Saint Agatha, for instance ; irritate ——'

' What possesses you to call her mine ? You are enough to drive one mad,' ejaculated Colonel Potten, with much irritability.

' Tut, tut ! don't get excited over a trifle. Irritate her a little, I say, and the *pattes de velours* run out their claws to strike. I fancy she is like the money of Henry VII., silver without and copper within. A few crosses to the disposition, a few rubs to the coin, will show up the copper.'

It was now Colonel Potten's turn to spring to his feet ; and almost shaking his fist in Paul Howard's face, he gave vent to his indignation. ' What do you know, or what could a man like you know, of her character ? I tell you she is as far above Mrs. Tracey as a star is above a will-o'-the wisp. *She* is the only perfect woman I ever have known.'

It was as good as a farce to see Paul Howard, as, leaning back in his chair with great composure, he gave utterance to a prolonged ' Wh-e-e-e-w ! ' that spoke volumes.

' Well, *this* is a piece of news which obliges me to

take a run in the frosty air to recover my senses. Look here, Potten, I'll bet on Tracey one hundred to one. Take my advice, fly from her as you would from Satan himself ; and whatever you do, when you do marry, marry a woman, and not an iceberg. Good-night.'

'Fool !' ejaculated Colonel Potten, as the door closed.

It opened again immediately, and Howard put his head in, just long enough to say,

'I don't charge anything as counsel in this case. One good turn deserves another, you know.'

In another week Agatha and Mildred were in their respective homes in New York, Colonel Potten had taken possession of his winter quarters in the same city, and Paul Howard was again 'the slave of toil,' to use his own expression.

PART II.

Glancing upon me with a scornful air,
‘Who were thy ancestors?’ he coldly asked.

DANTE’s *Inferno*.

Can SOULIÉ be right, when he says in his *Mémoires du Diable*, ‘Il n’y a donc pas dans le monde une femme sur la vie privée de laquelle on peut frapper même au hasard sans y éveiller le souvenir d’un crime ou d’un remords’?

CHAPTER I.

MR. LEE'S house in New York was undergoing repairs ; and although the artisans had promised to vacate the premises early in December, Agatha returned from Newport, the last of that month, to find them still in possession. This state of things being utterly intolerable, she decided to accept an invitation from her friend, Mrs. Belcher, living in 'the Quaker city,' to spend a month with her.

After a few busy days of preparation, she left New York without seeing the Traceys ; for although she found time to call upon Mildred, she did not find her at home, and the few lines that she left pencilled on her card received no answer.

Mrs. Belcher, as Edith Vassal, had been a school-mate of Mildred, as well as of Agatha ; and the three, during their school-days in New Haven, had been known to the students of Yale College as 'the three Graces,' although Agatha was far from possessing the beauty of 'the blond' Edith, or 'the brunette' Mildred, she having won her cognomen of 'the saint' from her demure face during divine service in chapel ; never coquetting with her eyes, as the two others were accused of doing ; or if she did, in such a saintly way that she escaped detection.

The Belchers were very pleasantly situated, both as to their residence and society ; for although they both belonged to Massachusetts families, and had only lived in Philadelphia since their marriage, they had managed to steer clear of continuing acquaintances that were not agreeable, and to maintain without being intrusive such as were congenial, which the author of 'Rose, Blanche and Violet' pronounces to be a most difficult feat to accomplish. It is true that Mr. Belcher was looked upon as a self-made man, for he was not one to parade his antecedents. It was enough for him to know that the stock he came from had been known in the new world for two hundred years and more, as inheriting the sterling qualities of their Puritan ancestors ; men whom history pronounced to be more than mere colonists, the exponents of a new civilisation founded on the idea that under God men could govern themselves ; men whose flight from England and self-exile on these shores was the strongest protest they could give against the divine right of kings in civil and religious government. Very proud was Mr. Belcher of his extraction, very proud that not only upon his father's and mother's side was he of genuine Puritan blood, but that the ancestors of his father's mother, and the ancestors of his mother's mother, were of the same energetic, resolute race.

Mrs. Belcher, it is just as true, was also represented as quite low-born, aspiring and vulgar, by the many whom she had found rude, uncultivated, or uncongenial, and to whom she had consequently turned her cold shoulder, quite regardless of her husband's advice to be politic. Not possessing an especially sensitive temperament, she cared as little for all the ill-natured stories put in circulation concerning her antecedents, as she would

have cared for the croaking of frogs on a mild spring evening ; believing with Alphonse Karr that envy and misrepresentation ‘accompagnent si régulièrement le bonheur, comme le croassement des grenouilles une belle soirée d’été, qu’il semble que la haine fasse partie du bonheur, et qu’elle avertisse les gens distraits qu’ils sont heureux.’

The morning after Agatha’s arrival, sitting with Mrs. Belcher in her cosy boudoir, she said, ‘Tell me Edith, whether you have heard anything about the Traceys lately.’

‘I should think I had. The town has been ringing with the scandal. They say she has eloped with Paul Howard, and her husband has applied for a divorce.’

‘Eloped !’ exclaimed Agatha. ‘That cannot be possible. Why, it is scarcely more than a month since she and Mr. Tracey left me in Newport. Eloped ! no, I never will believe that of Mildred. But how dreadful for such a story to get around ! What else have you heard ?’

‘Why, that Mr. Tracey is going to Europe ; that there is some one there whom he is suspected of wishing to marry ; that they never have cared for each other ; and oh, I don’t remember half I have heard. I used to see a good deal of them when they lived here, and I often wondered what Mildred could have seen in him to fancy. He is so haughty, and cold, and repelling in his manners ; and never seemed to think of anyone but himself. I believe that is the way with literary people, all brains and no heart. Poor Mildred, I am sure, has had a hard time of it ; but if she has run away with that renegade Paul Howard she will have it still harder. He will never marry her.’

‘She will never marry him, and she will never run away with anyone,’ answered Agatha; ‘nor did Paul Howard originate the trouble between Mildred and her husband: *that* dates back to the early days of their wedded life—long before she knew him. I cannot tell you what it was, for Mildred has told me in confidence; but I can say that I do but love her the more for all she has been through; although she committed a cruel wrong towards her husband; who, if you knew him as I know him, you would say was one of the noblest of men.’

Mrs. Belcher had a toss of her head that was very charming in her, and which did not in the least detract from her refinement; but then, after all it was scarcely more than a suggestion of a toss, and this suggestion was her only answer. It seemed to say, ‘I would not give much for his nobility.’

‘I have never known his equal,’ continued Agatha. ‘He unites the strongest intellect of a man with a woman’s tenderness of heart. In fact, I must warn you not to say anything against Carroll Tracey to me, for in him I have found that ideal friend that before I knew him I looked for in vain.’

‘Ah! I remember your hobby. Is he also a disciple of Plato?’ asked Mrs. Belcher, striving to suppress the merry twinkle in her eyes.

‘He is as firm a believer in the highest forms of friendship as I am; and in that attraction, or sympathy, or——’

‘Affinity,’ suggested Mrs. Belcher.

‘No, I hate that word, and I will not use it; but you know what I mean; for I have heard you say times without number that you feel the greatest attraction for

some persons, and the greatest aversion for others. This very thing it is that makes you the exclusive little woman that you are called.'

'I do not deny the charge,' replied Mrs. Belcher, and this time the toss of her classical head was a little more decided than before. 'But I cannot be as exclusive as I would like to be ; for could I have my own way, I would exclude every boor, and every fast girl and fast woman, not only from my own doors, but from society. I have such an antipathy to looseness of morals and manners, as well as to all ignorance and vulgarity, that I am never brought into contact with such people without mentally acknowledging myself to be a disciple of Darwin ; for I feel so unmistakably the blood of some ancestral porcupine stirring in my veins as to verify the law of selection.'

Agatha laughed her low, pleasant laugh, for she possessed one of those voices and laughs that are full of music, and which linger on the listener's ear like strains of some haunting melody.

This was but one of many long chats which they held during Agatha's visit, talking over their school-girl experiences, and those of later days ; discussing the books they had read, the new people they had met, as well as the friends of 'auld lang syne ;' and in this way, and in receiving and making calls, the days passed ; for the weather was too cold either for riding or driving in the park. There was not any remarkable amount of gaiety, but now and then a dinner, or a ball, or a theatre party, helped to keep the evenings from becoming monotonous, for Agatha's month had stretched out through the winter, and spring found

her still with her friend. Miss Penn's wedding was the great event of the season. The marriage took place in church ; and after the ceremony there was a grand reception at her mother's house ; and after the reception a collation to the favoured few. Agatha, with Mr. and Mrs. Belcher, were at the reception. So was Mr. Jenkins, who had come over from New York to be one of Mr. Atherton's groomsmen ; and Miss Lennox, who chanced to be staying a few days in town on her way to Washington ; and the 'charming widow,' Mrs. Barlow. So it chanced that Agatha found herself in a group, some of whom had been her guests at Newport ; and among them was Mr. Davenport, who belonged to one of the oldest and best of old Philadelphia families. Ormus Davenport he had been christened, after the ancestor from whom he had descended in an unbroken male line, and who had lived in the time of William the Conqueror. The large seal-ring which he wore on his third finger was an heir-loom, and bore a man's head in profile, *couped* at the shoulders, with a rope around the neck. This same rope afforded a theme for endless jests, to friends as well as foes ; but Davenport was too sensible a fellow to feel annoyed, and often joined in when his anti-republican tastes were commented upon. That his ancestors had been what the rabble call 'bloated aristocrats,' did not cause Davenport to think any more nor any less of himself ; but the knowledge that they had been men of worth, foremost among the men of worth of their own day, filled him with the laudable ambition to be worthy of them in his day and generation. As he stood near Agatha, looking down upon her with unmistakable admiration in his eyes, she asked,—

‘Who is that lady, with a dress as refined as her face ; and both dress and face as lovely as possible ?’

‘The one talking with Miss Lennox ? Mrs. Stanhope. She made a narrow escape from being a beauty, did she not ?’

‘I should say she had not escaped. She has that beauty of soul which attracts more than the beauty that lies in mere regularity of features and brilliancy of complexion. She reminds me, I can’t tell why—just a suspicion only—of Mrs. Tracey,’ said Agatha.

‘Now, you have “hit the nail on the head,” to use a trite expression. Their grandmothers were sisters. Mrs. Stanhope’s grandmother on her mother’s side was a Winthrop, and so was Mrs. Tracey’s,’ replied Mr. Davenport.

‘How droll !’ said Agatha, looking intensely amused. ‘How very droll that you, Mr. Davenport, should know who Mildred Tracey’s grandmother was, and that I should never have known that she had a grandmother, even ! Why, I could not tell to save my life what the maiden name of my grandmother was on my mother’s side.’

‘Which shows that you share with many others an indifference to family records that you would not evince in the lineage of a lower form of creation. Now were you going to buy a thorough-bred, would you not wish to know the pedigree of the animal ?’ he asked.

‘I cannot say I should. If the thorough-bred possessed the qualities that I wished in a horse, I would not care to have his pedigree.’

‘But you see,’ pleaded Mr. Davenport, ‘it would add so immensely to his value if he had been sired by some

famous trotter, that you ought to wish to know all about him just for his marketable value.'

'Ought I? Well, it only goes to show how my education has been neglected; for unless I wished to sell the animal, I would not give an old glove to know whether some far-off, dead sire suited me, as long as the living colt did. But even admitting that I *ought to*, it does not hold good that I ought to feel an interest in the grandparents of my friends; for men and women no longer possess a marketable value in our country.'

'But then, to change the simile, if you know the roots of a tree to be good, you are pretty sure that the fruit will be sound,' persisted Davenport.

'If I find the fruit good, I do not care to know anything about the roots. They are out of sight, underground with our ancestors; and to my way of thinking, God never intended that we should waste our time digging down amid their bones and dust, or after decaying roots, to find out the nature of things that are wisely hidden from our sight,' answered Agatha, with equal warmth.

Mr. Davenport pulled at his long, golden-red moustache, and looked pained, as well as perplexed, at this announcement of heterodox views from one who was 'every inch a lady.' Agatha continued,

'I value my friends for the good and attractive qualities that they possess, and not for the qualities that their ancestors possessed.'

'Oh, of course, of course. We all do that, I hope,' said Mr. Davenport, still caressing his moustache, and wondering, for the first time, what family of Lee, Agatha belonged to. Just at this moment, as if divining his thoughts, she said,

'Now I know you are dying with curiosity, Mr.

Davenport, to find out something about my ancestors. Well, I have no Puritan blood to boast of, nor am I from any old Knickerbocker family; nor yet do I boast of having descended from one of your famous Philadelphia families, whose names are linked with the earliest history of your State; but——'

Here Mr. Davenport interrupted her:

'I beg, Miss Lee, that you will hold a higher opinion of me than to imagine it to be necessary to tell me anything more about yourself than I already know.'

'And I beg of you, in return, not to think me so ignorant of one of the first requirements—the very first, I ought to say, of Philadelphia society. Everyone in America knows the saying which has passed into a proverb, "In Boston they ask, What does he know? in New York, How much is he worth? and in Philadelphia, Who is he? So I must make a clean breast to you, Mr. Davenport. My father inherited his business and a great deal of his money from my grandfather, who made for himself nearly every dollar that he ever possessed; for, strange to say, he had a genius for business, beginning with nothing, and ending with a sum that satisfied all his ambition. Yet, though he began life a poor man, he had the same weakness that you have confessed in yourself; and, should I ever have the pleasure of seeing you again, in our New York home, I will show you a picture of the home of his ancestors in England; a dear, odd old place, that I confess to loving myself; and which stands on ground that his family have held possession of for more than six hundred years.' Agatha, declaim as she might against pride of birth, could not conceal its traces in her eyes, and in the very carriage of her head, as she spoke.

‘There! did I not tell you so?’ exclaimed Mr. Davenport, recovering his equanimity upon finding his pet theory confirmed, instead of exploded, as he had feared it was about to be.

‘And now,’ Agatha went on to say, ‘do me the good turn to tell me something about the people here—not about their ancestors,’ she added, with a quizzical smile. ‘Who is that dapper-looking individual, devoting himself so assiduously to Miss Lennox?’

‘Mr. French. He is always in her train ; not that he meditates matrimony, but you see Miss Lennox’s fortune and position are such, that he feels rather complimented in being considered one of her admirers. He has a weakness for that distinction which is supposed to attend upon companionship with persons of distinction.’

‘He is not alone in that weakness ; is he, Mr. Davenport?’

‘Good heavens ! he is going to have himself introduced to you, as sure as I am a sinner,’ was the answer. ‘Adieu to our *tête-à-tête*.’

At that moment Miss Lennox approached with him, and he was presented to Agatha.

‘You are the very one, French, to tell Miss Lee who all these people are that she has never seen before,’ said Davenport, addressing him. Then turning to Agatha, he added, ‘Mr. French you will find as good an institution for us as the Almanach de Gotha for Europeans. I will wager whatever you like, that there is not a soul in what *he* would call “society,” concerning whom he cannot give us the antecedents, at least as far back as the great-grandfathers.’

‘But I do not wish to hear about the great-grandfathers,’ laughed Agatha ; ‘I want to hear about the

people themselves. Mr. Davenport seems to have grandfathers on the brain.'

'An epidemic that always prevails in this city,' said Miss Lennox. 'I never come here that I do not feel reproached for thinking so little about my own; but you see, Mr. French, we New Yorkers are too selfish to think of anyone but ourselves; are we not, Agatha?'

Mr. French, ignoring Miss Lennox's remark, and not waiting for Agatha's reply, answered Mr. Davenport by saying, 'Yes, I do plume myself upon the extent as well as the orthodox nature of my information in such matters; and where there has been any great-grandfather, I am pretty sure to know it. But society is sadly changed in these days through the new people whose money has brought them in.'

'Please spare me a recital who the new people are, as well as of dead people's merits or demerits, Mr. French, and tell me about the living. Who is that slender man with the interesting face?'

'Really, I beg your pardon, but I do not see any interesting face. Couldn't you designate him a little more clearly?'

'He is quite near you, to the left. Such wonderful eyes! I think I never saw a face with more strength or character in it.'

It so happened that there was a group of men standing near; and Miss Lennox saying, 'I think Miss Lee means Mr. Barber,' drew Mr. French's attention to a tall man with a funereal aspect, very much such a one as an undertaker would assume when officiating in his calling; his head slightly and solemnly bent forward, and his eyes looking out from under his overhanging eyebrows with a sinister expression.

‘Oh, that is Phil Barber. His wife is a New York woman ; a *ci-devant* belle. He is a great beau, and his especial province in society is to frown down intruders. Do you like his face, Miss Lee? He always puts me in mind of a Jesuit priest in the expression of his eyes, and with that little round spot on the crown of his head bare of hair.’

‘And who is the slippery-looking creature next to him, who only needs an umbrella to stamp him as a veritable Paul Pry? I thought I knew all your Philadelphia men by sight,’ said Miss Lennox; while Agatha, speaking at the same time, answered Mr. French’s question.

‘Yes, I do like his face amazingly. There is a man, if I am not mistaken, Mr. Davenport, who could start and sustain a subject of conversation without calling in the aid of his grandfather.’

‘For a very good reason,’ said Mr. French, drily; ‘he never had one.’

‘I thought you said his especial province in society was to frown down intruders, Mr. French?’

‘That is just what I did say, Miss Lee.’

‘But how did he ever get into society, if his antecedents are so questionable?’ asked Agatha.

‘Why, he pushed his way in, with the help of several very important levers. But he had such a deuced hard time to get himself established, that, like the sophomores at college, who revenge themselves, not upon those who cause them all the trials and afflictions of their freshmen careers, but upon the luckless fellows whom they find in like pitiable circumstances, so Barber now resents the wrongs he has endured from his seniors in society, by returning the same blows to those whom he finds just

without the iron bar that he has succeeded in crawling under.'

'Really, I cannot believe that a man whose eyes are so full of soul as that man's can possess so small a nature,' answered Agatha.

'You do well to receive Mr. French's statements with some grains of allowance,' broke in Mr. Davenport. 'Shall I bring him and present him to you?'

'No, pray do not just now. I do not feel in the mood for a tilting match; but I feel sure that I could not exchange ten sentences with him without his awakening me into one. Who is the handsome woman near him? —just to his left.'

'Mrs. Belton. She is divorced, and her husband has married again.'

'And who is the Bacchante, in a gown of arsenic green, and grapes in her hair, around whom all the men are hovering, like bees around clover blossoms?'

'Mrs. Matthews. She is not divorced, but if I were her husband she soon would be.'

Miss Lennox, who had been listening, now exclaimed triumphantly,

'There, did you ever hear of such a place for unhappy marriages?'

Agatha answered sadly, with an abstracted look in her eyes, as though her thoughts were far away,

'Without doubt there are many unhappy marriages everywhere, but one does not know in a large city like New York all that is going on; while here, where it is said three hundred families at most comprise what is called fashionable society, everything is canvassed and made public. I do not believe there is any more unhappiness here than elsewhere, only that people discuss the

affairs of others more than we, who have little enough time to think of ourselves, in the whirl that we are kept in.'

'That is just what it is,' said Mr. French ; 'and as a natural consequence of such a state of things, people often know more about us than we know about ourselves. Now, I heard only this morning that Miss Lennox and I were engaged to be married ; and I did not take the pains to dispute it, hoping that it might become true in time. What would you say were I to propose to make love to you, Miss Lennox ?'

'I would say that it was not worth while for you to take the trouble,' she answered drily.

At this moment Mrs. Belcher came for Agatha, and while standing by her side, for she had risen, Mr. Barber came up and asked Mrs. Belcher to introduce him to Miss Lee. When presented, he said,

'I am not only happy to make your acquaintance, Miss Lee, because I have so frequently heard you spoken of by our mutual friend, Mr. Bartholomew, but because I have a claim upon you of kinship.'

'Is it really so ?' asked Agatha. 'I believe blood is thicker than water ; and I confess to having had a feeling that I should find you congenial if I ever came to know you, during the half hour that I have seen you standing near. But I did not dream of any relationship.'

'There is, however, though very distant. On my mother's side I am descended from the Lees of High Legh, in Cheshire, England ; and Mr. Bartholomew has told me that your father is a lineal male descendant. Will you allow me to see you to your carriage ?'

They followed Mr. Davenport, who had Mrs. Belcher on his arm ; and before they drove off, both of the men

had accepted Mrs. Belcher's invitation to her opera box the following evening.

'Did you ever know anything so droll,' asked Agatha of Mrs. Belcher, 'as that Mr. Barber should turn out to be a relation of mine? And then they had just been telling me that he had no grandfather, and had pushed himself into society, and I don't know what all.'

'My dear,' said Mrs. Belcher, putting her hand on Agatha impressively, 'my dear, never believe one word that you hear about anyone's antecedents in this town. Mr. Barber is a great favourite with all the women, and one of the very few really intellectual men here; consequently, the men are down upon him; and only that it would be going too far, some of them would deny that he had ever had any mother. The next thing, now he has given out that he is descended from the Lees of High Legh, they will ridicule him for his descent. I never saw such a race of people. They scoff at one for being low-born, and when one proves that he is not, they ridicule him because he has pride of birth. Now, we New Englanders are at least consistent; we acknowledge the claims of birth, and we expect to find in people of good ancestry, ambition to keep up the culture of past generations, as well as that self-respect which leads one to respect the rights and claims of others. But here, culture has nothing to do with what they call family pride.'

'You speak feelingly, Edith.'

'I have reason to speak feelingly, for this state of things is so cramping and narrowing, that when I think my children will be in time brought under its influence, and even are now, young as they are, I do not know how to bear it. There is scarcely a week that passes that they do not come to me with some fiction that has been

retailed to them about themselves or others ; not that I care a button for what is said, but for the influence that it has in moulding their characters. To think, too, that it is so contrary to the spirit of our institutions ! Why, we are worse off than if we had titles of nobility. Then there would be no mistakes made, such as are common now—calling people “new,” and “parvenus,” whose families are five times as old as the families of those who call them so. Either advocate titles, I say, or take every man and woman for a gentleman and lady, and treat them as such, until their conduct proves them not to be. None of this absurd digging up of decaying roots, to get at their odour, before you can tell the scent of a Jamestown weed from a rose. But here we are, and let us drop genealogy and everything connected with it, for John despises, as much as I do, the false pride that is engendered here in connection with pride of ancestry. So far removed as it is, too, from all republican ideas ! As if any man born a gentleman, who has acquired the culture of one, is one iota less worthy because he prefers work with independence to idleness in dependence ! Such ideas will demoralise any community.’

CHAPTER II.

THE following evening Mrs. Belcher's opera box presented as distinguished an array of beauty as it was possible to assemble together in so small a space. Mrs. Belcher herself was still a beautiful woman, with the bluest of eyes, wavy golden hair, and cheeks like the leaves at the heart of a damask rose. Wrapped in her opera cloak of some soft texture of the colour of apple blossoms, or perhaps a few tints deeper, like those one finds in sea shells, she looked good enough to eat, as her husband proudly told her, when she stopped at his library door on her way to the carriage.

Seated in her opera box, Agatha came next, her face none the less attractive because of its ivory palleness. She had, as Carroll Tracey once told her, the eyes of a prophetess ; and they shone like stars this evening, the music seeming to bring an unwonted brilliancy to them. Still, it was the cold brilliancy of some far-off planet, that had no suggestion of earth in its light. The two young ladies who occupied the other seats in the front of the box were the acknowledged belles of Philadelphia society ; still Agatha's expressive face was not thrown in shadow by the side of all their brilliant beauty.

The first act of 'Traviata' was finished when the three men, Davenport, Barber, and Mr. Belcher, left, to make

room for the men who came crowding into the box, drawn thither by their admiration of some of its fair occupants, much to Mr. Barber's disgust, who thereby lost a *tête-à-tête* with Agatha.

'Have you seen the mysterious stranger in the opposite box?' asked one of them, addressing Mrs. Belcher.

Agatha heard the question, and, looking across the house, through her lorgnette, recognised Carroll Tracey, so placed that he could not be distinctly seen by any-one in the house save that infinitesimal portion that occupied the stage boxes. She heard the after conversation as one might hear in a dream, how much their curiosity was stimulated to find out who he was, and the various conjectures made concerning him, some declaring him to be the image of Carroll Tracey, though an older man. While they were still talking, Agatha saw him arise and leave the box, and she felt sure he was on his way to speak to her. She was not disappointed ; but the appearance of a spirit could not more have startled the other occupants. After exchanging salutations with Mrs. Belcher and Agatha, he sat down by the latter. What magical change had come over Agatha ? Her cheeks glowed with the soft, velvety warmth of peaches that have ripened in the sun ; her beautiful eyes absorbed the light like golden-brown pools steeped in sunshine. Mr. Tracey sat through one act ; and then, after saying that he would call the next morning to say good-bye, as he was going to sail for Europe, he returned to his box. Mr. Davenport was standing with Mr. Belcher, a little back, but where he could see Agatha's classically cut profile.

'Miss Lee lights up well,' he said.

‘She looks well in all lights,’ answered Mr. Belcher. ‘My wife, who, like all women, has a spice of match-making in her composition, is already planning how she can keep her here long enough to get her interested in some one of her admirers ; for she really is very much admired.’

‘I am told that she is not of the marrying sort ; in fact, that she has never had a history of any description, and I believe it ; for in the five years that I have known her—let me see, is it five years ?—yes, I met her father just five years ago, shooting down in the *Bayou-Tèche* country, and that was where our intimacy first commenced. Well, in these five years, I have never been able to make the slightest impression upon her. She has odd notions for a woman to hold, and is a perfect devotee at the shrine of Platonic love.’

‘Platonic fiddlesticks ! I’ll laugh her out of that. Go in for her, Davenport, if you have a fancy that way ; and I’ll bet ten to one you will win her.’

Mr. Davenport looked very wise, and resorting to his moustache, pulled it first one side, then the other, saying,

‘Colonel Potten once said that a man might as well make love to an iceberg as to a woman who is a professed believer in Platonic love ; and after long and careful observation, I believe the fellow is right.’

‘Oh, hang Potten ! You are enough of a man to know that a woman who is an iceberg to one man is the sun itself to another. Try Platonic love then with her ; and if you are as much of a man as I take you for, the rest will follow.’

Davenport shook his head. ‘It is of no use,’ he said. ‘If I am not mistaken, she has found her Platonic lover.

I was looking at her from the other side of the house when Tracey was talking with her, and I was reminded of the fable of Pygmalion. The statue was transformed. Do you know what brought him over here ?'

'I heard him tell Miss Lee that he came over to say good-bye to her before sailing for Europe. He has applied for a divorce, I hear, on the ground of incompatibility of temperament. I wonder if he knows of the slander, that everyone attributes to Paul Howard having put in circulation, concerning his wife ?'

'But is it a slander ? I had it from pretty good authority that he was at the bottom of the divorce ; although Tracey chose to shut it up and prefer his suit upon another ground.'

'Miss Lee knows the whole story, and Paul Howard had nothing to do with it, she says. There would seem to be no end of prospective divorces. That marriage that came off yesterday will end in a divorce if I am not mistaken.'

'Or something worse. But, to change the subject, do you really think that Carroll Tracey would be so regardless of appearances as to come over to see Miss Lee while his divorce suit is pending, if there is any feeling between them stronger than friendship ?'

'Candidly, I don't think any man stops for appearances where his heart is interested ; but Miss Lee, who is rather strait-laced in her ideas of propriety, would not allow him to come if there were any stronger feeling than friendship. Of that I am perfectly sure.'

'Then he has probably run over to advise with her, as a friend who knows all the circumstances.'

The curtain was now raised, and the third act began. Agatha never once looked over to the opposite box,

but, seemingly absorbed by the ravishing music, sat motionless. From the shadow of its curtains Mr. Tracey kept his eyes upon her, while with half-closed lids she looked as if ready to fall into a magnetic slumber. It was like a dream to her that he was so near; and to him, it was heaven to see before him her face in its peaceful repose.

There was to be a supper given at Augustine's, after the opera; but Agatha excused herself on the plea of a headache, and went directly home. As she sat by the smouldering embers of a wood fire in her chamber, wrapped in her warm dressing-gown, she all but reproached herself for the happiness that Carroll Tracey's friendship brought her. He had come to say good-bye, he was going to put the ocean between them but with souls so interlocked as theirs, she feared neither distance nor absence.

'Friendship of all ties most binds the heart,' she said, musingly. 'As long as we both live, so long will I have in him just the friend I have always wished for.' She had drawn her reclining chair near the fire-place, after turning the light so low that everything in the chamber had but a dim, shadowy vagueness of outline. A bed of coals glowed in the grey ashes on the hearth, and Agatha sat, or rather lay back in her easy chair, with her dainty little feet stretched out towards the warmth. Such a sense of complete happiness pervaded her being, that she could not conceive of greater. 'How well we understand each other!' she thought. 'When he looked into my eyes to-night, I felt as if he were looking down into my heart and reading there how entire and perfect is my trust in him. If I only could in some way be of use to him; if I could help him to be strong in these terrible

days, when he knows that his wife's name is being bandied about in the mouths of every gossiping man and woman ! How hard for a man, with a nature like his, to feel that he is an object of pity ! How terrible ! Yet his eyes are not half as sad now as in those days at Seacliff, when he disclosed to me, little by little, what a dreary life his has been. I wonder if ever the time will come when he will forget his misery—when it will all pass away like a dream. I wonder what I can do to help him to forget it. Perhaps he will ask me to write to him. Could I—ought I to write to him ? Why could I not ? That would indeed be a poor friendship that could hesitate about bestowing such consolation as friendly letters bring. And what letters I could write to him ! No matter how far he goes from me, he will always be with me. I have but to close my eyes to feel in memory the clinging tenderness of his touch, when he took my hand in his to-night. How inexplicable that wave of sensation that flowed from my head to my feet, leaving every nerve in my body as if attuned to melody ! How sweet friendship is ! how divine ! ' Musing thus, Agatha fell asleep in her chair ; but even in her sleep her thoughts still dwelt upon her intense, devoted friendship. Carroll Tracey seemed to be walking over a quagmire, and she was hastening after him with a lamp in her hand, to light him on his way ; but she was walking upon firm, dry ground. Once or twice he seemed to be sinking in quicksands, and then stretching out her hand to save, he would seize it, and almost drag her from her feet. At last they reached just such fair, flowery meadows as once before she had seen in her dreams, from which stretched upwards verdure-clad mountains, the tops of which were lost in white fleecy clouds,—stars

looking down upon her through them, peering out like angel's eyes. Then she lost sight of him, and of all else, excepting a glacier, that stretched out in an endless level road before her, over the rough, icy surface of which she was walking alone, with no one to support her steps, and not a vestige of life around her. So cold, so cheerless, so dreary, that she shuddered as she walked, feeling the cold of death upon her.

What bliss to awaken, and find that it was but a dream ! There was nothing but grey ashes upon the hearth now ; and Agatha really shivered with the cold as she nestled down in her bed, where, wearied as she was, she soon fell into a profound and dreamless slumber.

CHAPTER III.

IT was still early in the day, too early for general visitors, when Carroll Tracey called at Mr. Belcher's. Mrs. Belcher asked to be excused, and Agatha saw him alone. She was glad that it happened so, for she had a great deal that she wished to say to him.

After some common-place conversation, he said,

‘Of course you know that Mildred and I have separated, and that we are to have a divorce upon the ground of incompatibility of temper.’

‘I have *heard* a great deal. I *know* nothing; for Mildred has not written to me, nor did she come to see me when I was at home. I did hope when you saw her, and heard from her own lips all that she told me, that you would trust her for the future; and feel with me that she has suffered enough to atone for the dreadful wrong she did both you and herself in marrying you under the circumstances that she did.’

He shook his head. ‘No, no. The Rubicon is passed, and I breathe freer than I have for years. You can have no conception of the life I led. I might as well have been chained to a corpse since that night when my sister Agnes overheard her husband's infamous propositions to my wife; and Mildred admitted that when she accepted me she had loved him passionately; for I see she has kept nothing back from you—that you know all.’

‘Yes, I know all. She told me everything ; and, Mr. Tracey, do not forget how true a woman she proved herself to be in her answer to him. Remember that his conduct destroyed her love for him. Indeed, I think it is cruel in you to cast her off. Forgive me, that I speak so plainly ; but I would not be the friend to you and to Mildred that I am, did I not say to you what I think.’

‘It would be far more cruel,’ he answered, ‘both to her and to myself, were we to be still bound together in the eyes of the law, now that Harold Graham is free to marry her ; for I do not believe that she has ceased to love him. You know that women are proverbially lenient to such men—to all men whom they love, in fact. It is the men whom they have never loved towards whom they are severe and unforgiving. Mildred will marry Graham before the year is out.’

‘But she cannot marry him ; she cannot marry anyone ; for, you know, Mr. Tracey, how explicit our Saviour’s commands are upon divorce. Nothing short of infidelity divorces a woman from her husband, so as to leave her at liberty to marry again. Mildred never can marry while you live.’

Carroll Tracey leaned forward, seizing Agatha by the hand. ‘For God’s sake, don’t say such foolish words ! Tell me, you do not mean what you say !’

‘But I do mean all that I say ; I repeat it. No one, who is divorced as you and she are to be, ever ought to marry again, or ever can, without violating the law of God.’

He almost threw her hand from him as he arose and paced the room ; his brows knit, his face flushed, and his whole manner that of a man whose feelings were

wrought up to such a pitch of excitement that he dare not trust himself to words.

Agatha looked at him with an utterly bewildered look. At last he approached her. 'I shall not go to Europe,' he said. 'If these are your views, I shall stay at home to convert you. Forgive me for telling you so, but they are perfectly heathenish views to hold; perfectly heathenish. I came to tell you that before long my separation from my wife will no longer be only a nominal one, but a legal one; and to ask you if you would write to me while I am abroad—answer my letters, I mean. But—'

Here Agatha interrupted him. 'This is just what I hoped you would ask me. I will write to you every week if you wish it. Do not be angry with me for thinking as I do. You know our beliefs are a matter of conscience; and I cannot help feeling and believing that those who wish to be followers of Christ must obey all His commands, and not those that they wish to obey only.'

'Good God! Agatha, you will drive me mad!' he answered, closing his eyes, and pressing the palms of both hands over his temples; the fingers of one hand crossing the other on his head.

Agatha's face was more than anguished at the sight of the unintelligible suffering she had caused.

'Why do you feel what I say so acutely?' she asked. 'Possibly, Mildred may not think as I do about it; and you know what St. Paul says, "As a man thinketh, so is it to him." If she feels it to be no sin, to her conscience it will be no sin; but I would sooner hold my right hand in the flames until it was burned to a cinder, than marry

a man who was divorced for any other reason than that given by our Saviour as justifying one. But Mildred may not think as I do.'

'Mildred! what do I care for Mildred?' he exclaimed; then checking himself added, 'Yes, I do care for her, as a brother might care for a sister;' and as he spoke he resumed his seat near Agatha.

The pained, distressed look passed from her face as, looking into his eyes, she said, 'Do you think, even if Mildred loves Mr. Graham still, that such a bad man could make her happy?'

'I cannot talk of Mildred now,' he answered, stretching out his hand with the palm outward, as if he were pushing away the subject. 'But, in justice to Graham, I will say that he is not a bad man *au fond*, only a weak one; and God only knows what man would be strong under some form of temptation. Goethe's maxim—"The absence of temptation is the absence of virtue," may be true; but I would rather be without the virtue, than to be sorely pressed by the temptation.'

'I cannot make the allowances that you make for such a man; and I shall use all my influence with Mildred to prevent her from trusting her happiness with him, and I hope——'

'Here Mr. Tracey broke in,

'Don't speak of hope; you have destroyed all my hopes. Agatha, I did not come here to talk of Mildred. You never seem to think of yourself, but always of others. What has come between us that you no longer divine my thoughts before I clothe them with words? Why is it that to-day you seem as far from me as the north pole from the south, as far as any comprehension of my feel-

ings goes? It did not use to be so, Agatha. Do you not remember the little poem "Affinität" that I left for you in the drawer where we kept our translations?"

The cloud that his first words had evoked vanished from Agatha's brow, and her eyes beamed as she spoke.

'Did *you* write the poem? I thought it might be some translation that you had forgotten. Was it really your own composition? and did you write it to me?' she asked, her face flushing, and a dangerous tenderness in her eyes.

How he longed to take her in his arms—at least, to call her his darling; but he restrained himself, and answered calmly, 'I wrote it when the only ray of sunshine that broke through the night of my despair was that which dawned on me from your friendship. Since then, such hopes have been kindled in my heart, that were I to write you a poem now, it would be couched in very different language.'

Agatha, who had scarcely dared to acknowledge to her own heart that she thought the poem might have been possibly addressed to herself, felt mingled emotions of pleasure and pain in learning that it was so; but pain soon predominated. Could it be possible? Had she not put a wrong construction on his looks and words? This man, whose friendship she had so trusted in! Was he already turning traitor to their friendship, and pleading for more than she wished to give him? Carroll Tracey! who was still the husband of her dearest friend! No, she would not give any room in her heart to such suspicions. But when he continued, 'I came to tell you what those hopes are, and then to say good-bye to you, until I can claim their fulfilment; for, Agatha, I know

'we were made for each other,' then she knew all, and the revulsion of feeling that came over her seemed to benumb her brain, and to fasten upon her heart with a dumb ache, as if a serpent's tooth were gnawing at it. Was this the end, then, of her beautiful dream of friendship?

'It is agony for me to go from you,' he continued; 'a double agony, knowing what your views are in reference to marrying a divorced man. But I believe in destiny, and your fanaticism *must* give way before the strength of my passion for you. I will not offend you now by any words of love, knowing how you feel; but when I am gone, you will think of me with compassion, and "pity is akin to love," you know.'

'Is there no such thing as friendship in this world?' exclaimed Agatha with vehemence. 'No such thing as a love of the soul this side of heaven?'

He did not offer to take her hand now. He knew it would be useless, but he dropped down upon one knee beside her, and threw his arm around the back of the chair in which she was sitting. She made a movement as if to arise, and then he let his arm fall around her waist, holding her down, as he continued,

'You *must* listen to me. Think, it will be the last time for such long, weary months—long, weary months to both of us. My soul reads yours, and knows that which you have not yet acknowledged to yourself, for it is *my soul* that loves you, Agatha; but as long as the soul is held by the body, so long will the senses share the love of the soul. I tell you, the love of my senses is but as one drop in the ocean of my soul's love for you. You cannot separate them here; eternity alone can do that.'

‘Then I will wait for eternity,’ she answered, her face turned away from him, and one hand vainly seeking to loosen his from the grasp in which he held her waist. A mouse might as well have tugged to release itself from the steel trap that had caught it about its body, so firmly did he hold her. ‘I trusted you so entirely, and you have killed our friendship,’ she said, her head still turned away.

‘I have but killed it, to make our love immortal,’ he answered, releasing his hold of her waist, and suffering his aggressive hand to rest for one passing second as tenderly and caressingly upon her as the soft calyx enfolds some swelling bud or blossom. Then he arose to go, and Agatha stood up to receive his farewell, feeling herself under the spell of his words and his touch. He stooped to kiss her gown, where it lay nearest to her heart ; he touched his lips to her hair, that fell in two long curls from her coronal braid ; and she stood bewildered, like one roused from sleep in the middle of a dream, the vividness of which causes it to remain as distinct as a reality. And then, at last, he took her two hands, and held them softly, but firmly, between his own. He said something about the uncertainties of their ever meeting again in this world ; and the certainty that they would, if separated here, find each other in another state of existence. Agatha never could recall with any distinctness what he said ; for as he held her hands, she felt as if her very soul was escaping her—drawn out and absorbed by his own. There was a shadowy, dream-like memory of soft, warm lips pressed to her forehead, which seemed for the moment to have annihilated all other memories, and to have rounded and filled her life with a completion of bliss which she had never dreamed

of before, and he had gone. Then, and not until then, did Agatha know her own heart, and acknowledge that it was no wise, calm, cold friendship that she felt for Carroll Tracey, but such love as a woman can give only once, be her lifetime ever so long.

CHAPTER IV.

AGATHA prolonged her visit week after week, at Mrs. Belcher's earnest solicitations. Lent came and went, and still she was there, staying now for the Easter-Monday party that her friend was going to give.

Some English writer defines a ball to be an assemblage of over seventy-five persons, where there is dancing. Certainly, then, Mrs. Belcher's entertainment merited the name; and it was as charming as magnificently dressed women, beautiful and bewitching girls, plenty of dancing men, a wilderness of flowers, and an elegant supper can make an entertainment.

Agatha enjoyed it as thoroughly as it was possible for her to enjoy anything in these days; for, day and night, she was haunted by the remorseful reproaches of her conscience, in that love, and not friendship, for Carroll Tracey had taken possession of her life. But the ravishing music, the gay flowers, the whirl of the dancers, all conspired to take her out of herself for the time, and to stifle the still small voice that had of late ceaselessly sounded its warnings. But strive as she would to banish from her mind the dangerous memories that haunted it—to overcome the passion that glowed in her heart like a half-smothered fire bursting out anew, and flaming up when least expected, it was always there; always smouldering, smouldering,

and sending its subtle heat like poison through her veins.

Mr. Davenport, who had been a great deal in her society during her visit, and with whom she was upon the most friendly terms, looked a little blue over the prospect of her near departure. He took encouragement from the sadness in her face, fancying that upon her also fell the shadow of their approaching separation. The music had ceased, the ball-room was almost deserted, but still he remained by her side. She longed to get away from the glare of the lights—to reach the solitude of her chamber. Why did he not go?

She was not long left in doubt. The bouquet of rose-buds and forget-me-nots which he had sent her lay in her lap. Lifting it, he said,

‘I might tell you, Miss Lee, that there was not a bud in this bouquet that had not a message for you! For of course you understand the language of flowers; and I might say that everyone of these tiny blue flowers has a voice if you would but listen. But that is not my way of telling you what I have to say.’

‘Good heavens!’ thought Agatha, ‘is this man going to make love to me?’

He continued,

‘I cannot tell you that you are the first woman that I have ever fancied, for that would not be true; nor can I say that you are the first one I have ever loved; but I can say that I have never known one whom——’ Here Mr. Davenport became a little embarrassed as he met Agatha’s gaze turned wonderingly upon him; but soon recovering himself, he continued, ‘I mean that you are the first woman whom I have ever wished to make my wife; and if you——’

At this point Agatha interrupted him. 'The flowers need no voice to tell me how good a friend you are to me, Mr. Davenport. I know it, and I value your friendship too highly to wish to exchange it for any other sentiment. Do let us always be friends; do not think of any other possibility; for I do assure you there is none. I shall never marry. I have resolved that I will live and die a spinster.'

At this moment Mrs. Belcher appeared from behind the screen of plants near which they were seated. She looked as though she would like to retreat, but that was not possible, as Agatha immediately addressed her. Then Mrs. Belcher said, 'I was looking for you, Mr. Davenport, to beg you to add your persuasions to mine to induce Miss Lee to remain for the assembly.'

'I do not flatter myself that I have any influence with Miss Lee. I have asked her once, and she refused me,' he replied.

'Then ask her twice, for women always refuse the first time; that is proverbial, you know,' said Mrs. Belcher, with mischief in her eyes.

In vain Agatha gave an appealing look, accompanied by a slight frown. Mrs. Belcher continued,

'I have quite set my heart upon having Miss Lee remain for the assembly, and she cannot be so hard-hearted, I am sure, as to refuse our united entreaties. Can't you offer her some inducement to stay? Yourself, for instance. Pray do, Mr. Davenport.'

'I have reason to think that she would not consider that any inducement,' he answered, his face rivalling his moustache in colour, while Agatha blushed to the roots of her hair. Then, and not until then, did Mrs. Belcher take in the full meaning of the *tête-à-tête* that she had

interrupted. Mr. Davenport arose, and Agatha, giving him her hand, said,

‘I never say no when I mean yes; but you have been too kind to me, and you too, Edith, for me to refuse any request that I can grant so easily as this one of staying for the assembly. We will consider it a settled thing that I remain.’

Mr. Davenport stammered out a few words of thanks, but in such an embarrassed way that it was a relief to have him take his departure.

The next morning, at the breakfast-table, Mrs. Belcher tried to chaff Agatha a little about the incident.

‘I overheard you telling Mr. Davenport that you were going to live and die a spinster, which information you surely would not have given him if he had not proposed to make you his wife. Naughty Agatha! how could you refuse a man who has such a pedigree, such a “rent roll,” and last, but not least, such a heart?’

‘Do not call me to account for a sin that I have never committed,’ she answered.

‘I wish some one would call you to account for the sin of advocating Platonic love,’ said Mrs. Belcher. ‘But some day you will meet your fate, and then we will see the result.’

At the mention of Platonic love, Agatha’s face flushed.

‘I do not deny that I have been a believer in Platonic love, but I am one no longer. I hate the word now,’ she said, speaking with her usual candour.

‘Just listen, John,’ said Mrs. Belcher. ‘This revelation of Agatha’s is as good as a confession. She has trusted to some naughty man’s Platonic love and found it a sham.’

‘That is what all Platonic love is,’ he answered. ‘It is all counterfeit, all spurious. It is contrary to the laws of nature. There is but one kind of love between men and women—one kind, that every other kind runs into, if it is left to run its own way. Women may for a time believe in Platonic affection, but no man does. The woman who plays with it is like one walking over a quicksand towards a mirage that she sees beyond it—she may be swallowed up by the quicksand before she discovers that it is but a mirage that she is in pursuit of.’

Agatha made no reply, but Mrs. Belcher said,
‘How severe you are, John, upon poor, innocent
Platonic love !’

‘It is the reverse of innocent,’ he answered with warmth; ‘it is the wolf in sheep’s clothing of this day and generation; it is a humbug that ought to be exploded before society is undermined and exploded by it. Show me the married man, or the married woman, who advocates the doctrine, and I will show you one who is untrue to marriage vows in the spirit, if not in the letter.’

After a moment’s pause in the conversation, abruptly changing the subject, Mr. Belcher said,

‘Edith, did you know that the Barbers had a party last night ?’

‘Not a party; several who were here last evening told me that they found it difficult to get away from her little dance.’

‘But why did you not ask them here? I thought Mr. Barber had rather claimed Miss Lee as a sort of relation.’

‘A very distant one. It never occurred to me to

ask them, for Mrs. Barber and I are not in the least sympathetic. Surely you have not forgotten the dinner that I gave for her married sister, Mrs. March of Boston, the first year that we lived here, and how the very next year, when Emma Appleton, her sister's friend, was staying with me, she gave as large a party as we had last night, and we were all left out. Since then I have not invited them, for although I give people the same latitude that I take myself when we alone are concerned, I could not overlook such a want of courtesy to my friend.'

'But possibly she may not have liked Miss Appleton,' suggested Mr. Belcher.

'Then she should not have accepted my invitation to meet her in my opera-box only the week before, as she did. No, it was a direct cut to Emma, and the child felt it. Agatha, did you know that the Traceys have got their divorce, and that people are already talking about Mrs. Tracey marrying again?'

'How can people get divorced so easily?' asked Agatha.

'Money and influence can do anything in these days; they say that there was no trouble in this case, as one seemed as anxious as the other to be free. But the drollest part of it is that everyone thought she would marry Paul Howard—he was the lawyer whom her guardian employed—but it seems that she absolutely refused to have any communication with him, and that his partner was obliged to hold all the necessary interviews with her.'

'And yet people said they had eloped; she and Paul Howard, I mean. Do you not remember, Edith, that you told me so when I first came here?'

‘Yes, and it is another lesson not to believe all that one hears. I wonder that we ever believe anything, when we find that we have been taken in so often. What are you going to wear to the assembly? I wish you to look your very best.’

‘Shall I tell you what to wear?’ asked Mr. Belcher. ‘At least shall I tell you the colour that suits you best?’

‘I did not know that you knew one colour from another,’ answered Agatha. ‘I will be glad to hear your views; but I think I will have to wear a pale *lilas rosée*, with a Valenciennes over-skirt, for it is the only fresh gown that I have left.’

Rose is your colour, and I daresay the lilac will have the same effect. It goes marvellously well with your hair, skin, and eyes.’

‘Well, I declare, John! I think you must be smitten with Agatha. You have never said as much to me in all our married life. Agatha, I am glad that your dream of Platonic love is ended, for really I should feel anxious about my husband if it were not. You are a dangerous person to have around.’

‘How can you talk so absurdly?’ said Agatha

‘Not so very absurdly, after all that I heard last evening. Do you know, my dear, that you have the credit of having bewitched Carroll Tracey with those wonderful eyes of yours? He told some one that you had the eyes of a prophetess.’

‘I never heard that a prophetess bewitched any-one,’ answered Agatha, with an attempt at calmness that it was difficult to sustain with such a tumult within as Mrs. Belcher’s words had awakened. She felt as if a bomb-shell had exploded at her feet; but so

entirely did she retain her self-possession that her friend never suspected the force of the shaft she had sent.

The night of the assembly ball came around. It was delayed that year until the Easter holidays ; and the weather was most propitious ; not too warm to dance with comfort and pleasure ; nor yet too cold to prevent enjoyment of a promenade through corridors lined with odorous acacia and citron plants, the green branches of which were laden with flowers. Great pains had been taken to prepare the ball-room in the way of decorations and embellishments, exceeding those of any previous year, and to make it as worthy as possible of the fair matrons and charming belles who were to assemble there upon this occasion. The result was all that could be desired.

Between nine and ten o'clock carriages rolled swiftly up to the Locust Street door of the Opera House, and after setting down their occupants, as swiftly rolled away. The dressing-rooms were soon filled to overflowing, the lights sparkled and flashed, and flooded the ball-room ; the music undulated in long waves of harmony ; the hot-house plants that concealed the musicians, and that lined the corridors, gave out voluptuous odours, and enlivened by their blooming beauty the scene that was soon to be one whirl of rushing gaiety—a grand carnival of pleasure. The current at last set towards the doors of entrance ; and then, what a stream of blooming matrons, lovely girls, and well-dressed, distinguished-looking men swelled the tide ! To the strains of an inspiring march the assemblage pursued its promenade, here and there a few falling off to occupy some nook for a *tête-à-tête*, or for the purpose of securing seats from

which they could enjoy the brilliant scene at their leisure. Then the band broke into one of Strauss's delicious waltzes, and the promenading ceased.

Mr. Barber was the first to ask Agatha for a dance. Her gown was exquisitely becoming, and she had never looked to better advantage than when she with Mr. Barber—who well knew how to hold his partner—had floated off together. Mrs. Barber, who was a *ci-devant* New York belle, with flossy blonde hair, phosphorescent eyes, and white glistening teeth that were for ever visible from behind her short upper lip, was standing near, leaning upon the arm of Mr. Marston, a middle-aged beau, who, in his search for a wife, had never yet been able to find a woman sufficiently perfect to meet his ideas ; but as Agatha swept past, he exclaimed enthusiastically,

‘Who is that queenly creature waltzing with your husband ?’

‘Do you call her queenly ? I think she is very commonplace.’

‘*Au contraire* ; she is of a most uncommon style ; her neck and arms are the most delicious pieces of flesh and blood I have ever had the good fortune to see. Commonplace ! why she is a Juno, a perfect goddess ! Do you know who she is ?’

‘Oh yes, she is a Yankee, whose grandfather made some money and removed his family to New York to spend it ; old Ashbel Lee ; I daresay you have heard of him, he left an enormous fortune,’ she said, a wicked light dancing in her eyes.

‘I do not care about her grandfather, but herself. What is her name ? Is Lee her father’s or her mother’s name ?

‘Her father’s. Her name is Agatha Lee. She is staying with those horrid Belchers—such vulgar, pushing people that I do not have anything to do with them. Miss Lee is not considered the least of a belle, or a beauty either in New York; but she is rather striking-looking, is she not? You know she is the one who had an affair with Carroll Tracey that ended in his wife’s getting a divorce from him.’

‘On the contrary, it was he who got the divorce; and his wife gave him cause to get it, if all that is said of her is true. She is going to marry Paul Howard, I hear.’

‘I do not know about that; but I do know that Carroll Tracey has been over here to see Miss Lee since she has been staying with the Belchers. She is very sly, I fancy. Still waters run deep, you know.’

‘Mrs. Belcher is a distant connection of mine. I must ask her what foundation there is for such a story; if there is none it ought to be nipped in the bud; and I shall avail myself of my relationship to ask for an introduction at the same time. I have been in New Orleans the last month, or I should have known sooner that Miss Lee was staying with her.’

Mrs. Barber, thoroughly discomfited by hearing that Mr. Marston was a connection of Mrs. Belcher, after the remark she had made about them, scarcely knew what to say; but espying Mr. Dexter and Mrs. Barlow near, she turned the conversation upon them. Her heightened colour alone revealed the annoyance that she experienced at her mistake. ‘Look at Mrs. Barlow; what she can see in that man to fancy is more than I can divine, yet you see that something serious is really going on.’

Mr. Marston looked in the direction indicated, and

espied Mrs. Barlow and Mr. Dexter apparently quite absorbed in each other. The Dexters were old friends of Mr. Marston, and when some gentleman came up to claim Mrs. Barber for a dance, Mr. Marston looked around for the wife ; feeling sure she was within the range of vision, for the reason that she never failed under any circumstances to keep one eye on her husband. He was successful ; and joining her, was soon enlightened with regard to the merits of the various gowns that were worn on the occasion ; for Mrs. Dexter had the eye of a connoisseur, or *couturière*, for deciding which were new, and which were renovated for the occasion. At last Agatha came under her scrutinising gaze.

‘That is a new gown that Agatha Lee has on ; bran new, I am sure of that. Her father is said to be worth a mint of money, and I daresay she has a new one for every ball. You know whom I mean, don’t you ? The New Yorker, who is staying with Mrs. Belcher. She really looks handsome to-night. Mr. Dexter and Mr. Lee are great friends.’

‘I never saw her before to-night, but to my eyes she is the handsomest woman in the room, taking figure as well as face into consideration ; and yet, she is not what would be called a beauty ; but she has eyes like a Sibyl, and a form that would make the fortune of a sculptor if he did but copy it.’

When forms came under discussion, Mrs. Dexter looked uneasily in the direction of Mrs. Barlow and her husband, reminded of her by the fact that she possessed a figure very much admired by the men, while her own was not moulded after that of a Venus. She caught such an interchange of glances between them as to thoroughly discompose her ; and bravely determining

to put an end to that flirtation, she asked Mr. Marston to take her to her husband.

They also seemed to have been discussing Agatha, for as Mrs. Dexter approached them, leaning on Mr. Marston's arm, Mrs. Barlow, after the first greetings, said,

'We have just been saying how lovely Agatha Lee looks to-night. She has a different look in her face; some change has come over her. Until now, she has always seemed to me like one of those fabled beings who are born without a heart, or without a soul, or without something, whatever it is, that does not come to them until they love or are beloved, which is it?'

'I have never found her wanting either in heart or soul. She is not the least of a flirt, and has never had her name coupled with that of any man, which is a most unusual thing in this day,' replied Mrs. Dexter, intending to be very severe.

'How much amusement she must have lost!' rejoined Mrs. Barlow. 'Some one has said that the sinners have the best time in this world, and the saints in the next; so I suppose she will have her good time hereafter.'

'If I were to venture an opinion,' said Mr. Marston, 'I would say that she looks as though she were equally removed from the one and the other. "A creature not too wise nor good for human nature's daily food." I would be willing to wager that it was just such a kind of woman of whom Steele said that to have loved her was a liberal education.'

'Why, Marston, I never knew you so enthusiastic about a woman before,' said Mr. Dexter.

'I beg your pardon; I am always enthusiastic over a beautiful woman, a beautiful painting, or any beautiful

work, whether of nature or of art. In fact I am always in love ; and I console myself for my folly by remembering that Thackeray said that without love he could fancy no gentleman.'

' You talk in this way, and yet, there you stand, yourself an evidence of the hollowness of your professions ; for are you not a bachelor ? ' laughed Mrs. Barlow.

' I am not to blame, madam, that I am not a married man. It is my misfortune, not my fault. No woman has ever offered to marry me, and I am too conscious of my own unworthiness to offer myself to any woman. How could I be so presumptuous ? '

They all joined in the laugh that followed Mr. Marston's announcement, Mrs. Dexter exclaiming,

' You certainly have the merit of being original.'

' Not at all, for it is my theory that this is why so many men remain unmarried. Believe me, there is more modesty among men than you think. They are boys, not men, whom you hear declaiming that society is swarming with girls ready to marry them. My experience has been that it is the other way, swarming with men trying to marry the girls ; and that the trouble is that, like myself, they wish to marry too many of them at the same time to be willing to settle down with one. Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Barlow ? '

' I think it is very naughty of you, Mr. Marston, to advance such principles. There are a good many disciples of Bichat in these days. You know he says that love is a sort of fever which does not last over two years.'

' *Un caprice enflammé par des obstacles,*' quoted Mr. Marston.

' But then all temperaments are not the same. Be-

cause some men are born with fickle temperaments, I do not lose my faith in constancy. There are still as good fish in the sea as ever were caught, to my thinking.'

'Only they do not bite as often,' answered Mr. Marston with a quizzical smile.

Meanwhile Mrs. Dexter had edged around to the side of her husband, and they had been indulging in a short conjugal *tête-à-tête*.

'It is disgusting to see how this woman fastens herself upon you,' said Mrs. Dexter. It was one of her virtues that she never fancied her husband to be the aggressor; it was always the women who were after him.

'I beg that you will be careful what you say. You will be overheard,' he answered.

Mrs. Dexter continued, determination in her eye and mien, 'I am not going to have her devotion to you made a topic of conversation. If you take her to supper to-night, I will order a carriage and go home.'

'I shall be very sorry to have you go without your supper, but having already invited her, I shall be compelled to remain.'

'She having already invited you, you mean!'

This was the true state of the case, Mrs. Barlow having intimated in broad terms her hopes in that quarter, but Mr. Dexter was too much of a gentleman to admit such a possibility, and he replied,

'I mean just what I say, Emily; and I advise you not to interfere in such matters.'

A lull in the dancing gave opportunity for another promenade, and Mr. Dexter offered his arm to Mrs. Barlow and walked away. They found a shaded little recess in one of the corridors, and Mrs. Barlow, always ready to 'improve each shining hour,' gave herself up

to the sentimental, looking quite ready to glide into the tender ; when again, Mrs. Dexter hove in sight, all sails set, and seemingly determined to carry all before her.

‘Mrs. Barlow, will you allow Mr. Dexter to take me to my carriage ?’ she said, looking as though she expected opposition.

‘Certainly, with the greatest pleasure in the world, provided you do not keep him too long. He has promised to take me to supper. You know what Philadelphia suppers are, Mrs. Dexter, and I should be inconsolable if deprived of mine for want of an escort.’

Mrs. Dexter felt, as she afterwards told her husband, ‘as if she could put a pin in the creature’s neck,’ but not to be outdone in seeming civility, she answered,

‘I am sure there is no danger of Mrs. Barlow’s ever being left without an escort. She understands too well how to secure them.’

It was not Mrs. Dexter’s fault if Mrs. Barlow put a wrong construction upon these words.

Mr. Dexter, excusing himself, took his wife to the dressing-room, where, however, matters were so amicably arranged, that they were both enabled to enjoy Augustine’s famous croquettes and delicious terrapin, to say nothing of the Roederer, with which the managers of the assemblies regale those who attend their charmingly appointed fêtes. One may travel over the world and return without finding another town or city, where the suppers can vie with those given at Philadelphia balls ; and though one should pursue researches for more charming women, or for girls with more beauty, equally far, they will return to give the palm to the Quaker city.

‘Mrs. Barlow felt just a little piqued when she saw Mrs. Dexter returning ; but not so much so that she

failed to enjoy her supper. Refusing to go down to the supper room, she implored Mr. Dexter to bring her supper up to her. Accordingly, he left her for that purpose, returning with a plate laden with eatables in each hand, a napkin over his arm, a bottle of champagne under it, and two glasses peeping out from his waistcoat. While absorbed in their supper to the extent of being regardless of their opportunity to pursue their flirtation unmolested by any fears of Mrs. Dexter's undertaking a reconnoissance they heard the sound of voices from beyond the screen of plants where they were seated.

'Who is her partner? Davenport, I daresay. I thought he would lead the cotillion with her.'

'Not a bit of it. French leads with Mrs. Barber. I do not know how true it is, but I hear that Davenport has gone home—that he got into a row with French.'

'I saw him looking like a big thunder cloud, or rather, as if he had that ancestral rope of his around his neck, and was on his way to be hung, edging himself through the crowd in the lobby, just before supper. What has gone wrong with him, I wonder?'

'I can't vouch for the truth of what I tell you, but I heard he had taken offence at something French had said about Miss Lee. I believe she was mixed up with the Traceys and their divorce in some way.'

Then the voices grew more distant and died away.

'Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny,' quoted Mrs. Barlow.

'So Davenport is another victim, is he?' said Mr. Dexter. 'As well as I like Miss Lee, I cannot understand how such a cold, unimpressionable, statuesque woman can make the impression that she seems to on men. Now, there is Mrs. Belcher with whom she is staying, she

is a woman to make a man feel as though he would give ten years of his life to get a kiss from her.'

'Fie! fie! I am ashamed of you. What would Mrs. Dexter say to hear such a sentiment from your lips?'

'I do not propose to distress Mrs. Dexter with any such sentiments, I have too great a regard for her peace of mind, and—ahem! for mine own also.'

'But do you really prefer blondes? I think they always have such a namby-pamby look,' asked Mrs. Barlow.

'They look as though they could let their husbands rule if it came to the point as to which should be master.'

'But no clever woman would allow matters to come to such a sharp point as that would be. You know what the poet says about seeming to obey? Men are beautifully managed when they assert their power and claim it as their right on all occasions. Their wives are sure to deceive them. The true secret of happy matrimonial alliances is never to preach obedience and submission, and all that sort of humbug, but to let life go on as it should with mutual concessions. Ah well, it is easier to preach than to practise; but I often feel that if I had had but half a chance, I would have been a very different woman. As it is, "I know the right, and still the wrong pursue!"' Mrs. Barlow sighed as she spoke, and something very like tears glistened in her eyes.

'This is a new *rôle* for you,' said Mr. Dexter, who never had much to do with sentiment, excepting when he turned it to his own use in others. She saw the look of amusement that flitted over his face.

'Do you fancy that I never have any serious moments nor any hours in which I loathe my life, and wish that

excitement were not as necessary to me as stimulating drinks to the inebriate ?'

'Don't get on to that strain. It does not pay ; life is short, make the best of it,' answered Mr. Dexter.

'But I am making the worst of it, and am fully conscious that it is so. However, I shall not trouble you with my moralising. Fill up my glass, and we will drink death to the blues. What is Cilly Aphorpe doing —groping about those chairs so long ?'

'I daresay he is arranging his seats for the cotillion.'

'He is taking time enough to do it. Here comes Mr. Marston.'

'This is the second time I have seen him reconnoitring. He does not see us, but evidently his eye is on Aphorpe.'

Just then, Aphorpe crossed over, and disappeared through one of the doorways that led into the lobby ; and Mr. Marston, who had been standing at the farther door, watching his movements, walked to the chairs, and examined separately each card attached to them. Presently, there was a movement among the human parterres of flowers that filled the staircase, terrace upon terrace—it was as if a summer breeze had blown over beds of blossoms, rippling their variegated petals ; gossamer folds swayed here and there, ribbons like tendrils, fluttered in and out ; the rose-buds and lilies, and pansies, the violets and snow-drops and daffodils floated up as if borne onwards by the breeze ; followed closely by the maturer dahlias, Queen Margarets, gorgeous tropical flowers, in almost endless array, until once more the ball-room was ablaze with beauty as well as flashing light.

The cotillion was about commencing. Nearly all were seated, excepting Agatha, who was to dance with

Mr. Bartholomew, he having come over from New York for the purpose of attending the ball. She was standing quite alone in front of a group, and her partner endeavouring to discover which particular chairs were those that he had selected before going down for supper. Mr. Bartholomew, at first perfectly cool and self-possessed, was now getting a little flushed and excited, when his attention was arrested by a smothered laugh near him. Looking around, he saw a lady with her handkerchief pressed to her face dividing her glances between Agatha and himself. Agatha observed it also, but instead of disconcerting her, it only increased that frigidity of manner, which many called haughtiness, as she walked to the first empty chair and sat down. No duchess could have carried herself with a statelier air.

‘Will you allow me to look at the card on your chair?’ said Mr. Bartholomew, addressing the partner of the damsel whose amusement at his discomfiture had betrayed her breeding; for that it was anything more than that, never entered Mr. Bartholomew’s mind.

‘Certainly,’ and the young man immediately arose and showed a card on which was written, ‘C. Apthorpe.’

‘It is very strange, very strange indeed. I am quite sure that I chose these very seats, as being directly opposite the principal entrance door. Why, Apthorpe, you were with me when I attached my card.’

‘Really, I was so occupied with my own that I did not look to see where you took yours. Probably a little farther on.’

So a little farther on to the right, and a little farther on to the left, Bartholomew searched, but in vain. Then he appealed to Mr. French, as the leader of the cotillion. Mr. French positively could not help him, for so many

more had already applied to him for seats than the room would accommodate. Agatha motioned to him, saying when he joined her, 'I really do not care to dance to-night; do not give yourself any farther trouble, unless you will be disappointed.' He gave her his arm, and they crossed the room, and were about passing out to the corridor when one of his acquaintances called to him.

'Where are you going? Here are your seats. I took mine expressly to be next to Miss Lee.'

Mr. Bartholomew could scarcely believe his eyes. It was like a feat in legerdemain. There, in the remotest possible corner from the seats he had chosen, half hidden from sight by a jutting column, were two unoccupied chairs with his card attached to them. They took their places as quietly as if everything had been as they desired; for Mr. Bartholomew was too much of a gentleman to make a scene in the presence of ladies, no matter how great the provocation.

Many times during the cotillion, gentlemen wishing to take Miss Lee out, went to Mrs. Belcher to ask where she had hidden herself.

Mrs. Belcher felt vexed with Mr. Bartholomew for having made such a bad choice of seats; and she so expressed herself to Mr. Marston the following morning, when he came to call upon Miss Lee, telling her that he had vainly tried to find her and have himself presented after the supper. Mr. Marston said,

'I assure you Mr. Bartholomew was not in the least to blame. I myself saw him choose his seats before supper; and he took them opposite one of the entrance doors, near those of the leader. The same chairs were occupied by Mr. Apthorpe and Miss Toady.'

‘What!’ exclaimed Mrs. Belcher. ‘Are you quite sure of that?’ her face flushing as she spoke.

‘Perfectly sure.’

Here Agatha spoke.

‘I did not tell you of my adventure last night, Edith. Our chairs were changed, and I was quite unsuspecting of any rudeness until I caught Miss Toady’s eye, and the sounds of her suppressed merriment. Then I sat down by Mrs. Barber, for I knew that laugh meant mischief. She was all smiles, but still as I looked in her eyes while answering some remark that she made to me, I thought of Geraldine’s snake-like eyes, in Coleridge’s poem, you know, and the conviction came to me that if there was any plot to deprive us of our seats she was in it.’

‘Why did you not tell me of this sooner?’

‘I did not think it was worth mentioning. Besides, I knew it would annoy you, and I hoped you would never hear of it?’

Mrs. Belcher turned to Mr. Marston.

‘Did you ever hear of such an unprovoked and abominable rudeness?—to a stranger, too?’

‘No, I admit that I never did; but Miss Lee has only herself to thank for it. Had she been less attractive, no one would have wished to put her out of sight. “Out of sight out of mind,”—pardon me for quoting a proverb—but it expresses the object to be gained by the rudeness, I fancy.’

‘The insult was not meant for Miss Lee; it was intended to touch me through my guest, and she has succeeded. I never knew before what it is to feel vindictive; and I must confess it is not a comfortable feeling.’

Other visitors were announced, and Mrs. Belcher found an opportunity to say a few words to Mr. Marston, that were meant only for his ear. In return for the confidence

thus reposed in him, Mr. Marston gave her a caution in reference to the possibility of rumours reaching her, connecting Miss Lee's name with Carroll Tracey's, in order that she might be prepared to meet them.

At first Mrs. Belcher was disposed to deny such a possibility, as well as to resent its having been broached ; but after Mr. Marston had detailed his reasons, she saw the danger.

‘It is diabolical !’ she exclaimed.

‘It is devilish, *passez-moi le mot*,’ he answered ; ‘but this is what pretty women come into the world for—to be slandered. It is the penalty they must pay for being attractive. After all, you used the right word when you said diabolical, for in Greek this word stands for calumniator.’

‘As I said before, I am not vindictive, Mr. Marston. My religion consists in trying to do unto others as I would have them do unto me, rather than in being subservient to creeds and dogmas ; but this experience, touching me through my friend as it could not have done had it been any rudeness shown to myself, determines me to know the pleasure of revenge for once in my life. I would like to see that woman humiliated in some way, and to have it in my power to show her in her humiliation the contempt that I feel for her.’

‘Everything comes to those who know how to wait,’ replied Mr. Marston.

‘Yes ; and “*rira bien qui rira le dernier.*”’

CHAPTER V.

AFTER Agatha's return to New York her first call was made upon Mildred. She could not help feeling shocked to find her so light-hearted and radiant with happiness. When Agatha told her how often she had thought of her, and how much she had felt for her, in all that she had been through, she answered,

‘I assure you that your sympathy has all been thrown away ; I have never before been so happy. If you could realise, Agatha, what a life of constraint and suppression I led as Carroll’s wife—the complete repression of the best part of my nature ; and then, the never-ending self-reproach in that I had made a wreck of his life, as well as of my own, you would know the awful relief that it is to me to have the long agony over. I can compare it to nothing else than to see a form that has been dear to you buried out of your sight, when death has robbed it of the soul that made it dear. Can’t you understand what I mean when I say it is an awful relief to have it over ! ’

‘Certainly I can and do ; I see at last that you were both quite right.’

‘Of course we were. I never doubted that it was a sin to live as we did, in the wrong done to him and to myself ; but I shrank from the exposure of a separation ; pride kept me from it. And then, after all those long, cruel

years, in which my loyalty was unwavering, my fidelity to the duty that I owed him—duty which is but a thorn when all the blossoms of life are stripped from it. That was all that I had to keep me right, and yet it did keep me right ; and then, to think he so little knew me as to fancy that I was unfaithful to him ! He thinks that I will marry Harold Graham. How little men know about women ! Why can't they learn that love comes and goes without our being able to tell the why and the wherefore ?'

Agatha quoted a line from a poem. ' That was not love that went,' she said.

' Well, passion then ; whatever you choose to call it. If Harold stood here now, and asked me to marry him, I should tell him just what I told him when he proposed an elopement, that I have lost every vestige of love that I ever had for him.'

' That is all very well for you to say now ; but were you to see him, you might find him possessing more influence over you than you think. You are young to remain unmarried ; and if you do not think it wrong, as I do, for a woman and man divorced as you and Mr. Tracey are, to marry again, I see no reason why you should not marry ; but I hope if you do, your choice will be a better man than Mr. Graham.'

' Oh, I do not say I will never marry anyone. It would be very hard for me to think of growing old without any husband to love me, or children to keep my heart young ; but I do say that if ever I marry a second time, it will not be from pique. Married life without love is a fearful bondage.'

' It must be,' said Agatha fervently, ' and I have at last decided to remain a spinster all my days. I am quite

sure now, that I will never see a man whom I will be willing to marry.'

'I begin to think you never will, but it is equally sure that you will never become one of those angular, sour, sharp vinegar-cruets, that some old maids are. You will be like your Aunt Hester, whom everyone loves, and who grows lovelier and more loving every year of her life. I am sure you are too good for the best man that lives, and you will have to content yourself with Platonic love. I can recommend Carroll for that kind of love. Have you made any translations during the winter?'

Agatha's heart gave an awful leap ; or to speak with anatomical precision, the muscles of her heart by a sudden contraction produced the sensation which persons are in the habit of calling a movement of the heart. She scarcely found breath to answer,

'Only one or two of Heine's poems. What are you reading now ?'

'I am reading "Problematic Characters," for the second time. I have found an Oswald in real life, and I am reading the book with renewed interest.'

'I hope and pray that you are not going to be a Melitta.'

'How could I be one ? Melitta had a husband. I have none.'

'But remember, Melitta was neglected and deserted by Oswald after she had no husband,' asserted Agatha.

'Do not distress yourself unnecessarily, sweet "Saint Agatha." As a married woman I proved myself to be no Melitta ; and I have faith enough in myself to fear neither neglect nor desertion, should any Oswald ever love me, and be loved by me. But I did not say I had

found *my* Oswald ; only *an* Oswald. By that I mean a man equally attractive, equally gifted by nature, and one who, like Oswald, has never yet loved and been beloved by any woman sufficiently good and true to change his fickle soul into the faithful one into which it is capable of developing when he does meet such a one.'

'And who is this paragon ?'

'That is my secret. But since a fair exchange is no robbery, tell me your secret, and I will confide mine to you.' Mildred's eyes were sparkling with suppressed merriment.

'My secret !' cried Agatha, her startled soul showing itself in her face, 'My secret ? What do you mean ?'

'Oh, you know very well that you have one. I do not wish to force it from you ; but this is certain, as long as you keep yours from me, I will keep mine from you.'

Agatha felt as though the floor were giving way beneath her feet, as though the room were spinning round and round ; the very earth seemed to her to have been jarred in its orbit, so shaken and stunned did she feel.

Mildred enjoyed Agatha's bewildered looks, and laughed mischievously ; but finally said,

'I may as well tell you that I know all about it ; that he has told me all that passed between you, and—but good heavens, Agatha, what is the matter with you ? You are as white as a sheet ?'

'I feel faint ; will you ring for a glass of water ?'

She rang for the water, brought salts, took off her bonnet ; and when Agatha's colour returned, she said tenderly, still kneeling by the lounge where she had made her lie down,

'Can it be possible that you love him ?'

Agatha threw her arms around Mildred, weeping passionately.

‘I know how well he loved you. Can it be possible that you have loved him all this time, and given him no hope?’ questioned Mildred.

‘Do not reproach me! I never knew, I never dreamed that it was love. It is killing me, it is killing me, to have found it out at last,’ she sobbed. ‘Do not let us talk of it; do not allude to the subject again—it is too humiliating. Believe me, I did not know it was love. I did not know it.’

Mildred, looking much perplexed, tried to soothe her friend; but Agatha still kept her face from sight.

‘Why do you say it is humiliating, dear? no love should be humiliating. Is it because you consider your relationship an insurmountable obstacle that you have never let him know that you love him?’

‘Relationship?’ cried Agatha, sitting bolt upright, and looking straight in Mildred’s eyes. ‘Relationship! Of whom are you talking?’

‘Of your cousin, of course. Did you not divine that he is the Oswald of whom I was telling you? He confessed to me that you are the only woman he ever really wished to marry until—before—. Oh, Agatha, you will be terribly shocked I know; but I have to make a confession; and you have yourself to blame, for I am sure you hastened affairs, by telling him that I would marry Graham; and so he came straight to me and told me how jealous he was, and we both acknowledged that we had fallen in love with each other; and I told him everything, and he does not love me any the less for all that has happened to me. So I have promised to marry my Oswald some day; and I have no fear of ever being loved any less—much less of being deserted as poor Melitta was.’

Agatha, with a sigh of relief that came from the very core of her heart, only said,

‘This *is* a revelation.’

‘Darling Agatha, I am so happy that it is not my Oswald whom you love, that I do not even care to know who your Baron Oldenberg is; for some profoundly mysterious, uncanny Baron Oldenberg, I am sure it is to have taken such a hold upon you despite the insurmountable obstacles. Ah, to think that you were going to leave me with the impression that you were not capable of any love but Platonic love; well, it only goes to prove that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked; as well as that you are no better than the rest of us; and I love you a thousand times more that it is so; for I do not believe God ever intended any of us to be saints in this world. Temptations resisted, wrongs endured, and patiently lived down, sorrows borne with resignation, will help us in this life to become saints in the next; but never here, *never* here.’

Often in the days that followed Agatha thought of Mildred’s words; and how nobly *she* had resisted temptation, how patiently she had borne her great sorrow—her years of death in life, as it were. And in these days Agatha was tortured with her memories in that love for a married man, in the guise of friendship, had stolen its way to her heart, filling life with new meaning, steeping it with rapture, and in the end teaching her that no one is secure from temptation; but rather that virtue is tested by it, as gold by the refiner’s fire.

CHAPTER VI.

AGATHA'S first letter from Carroll Tracey was written in London, immediately upon his arrival there, and reached her about two months after they had parted. May had come in most graciously that year, with the bluest of skies and the softest of zephyrs. Agatha dreamed her days away, living over and over scenes that would not be forgotten; memories of dangerous sweetness that she could not expel. It was spring in her heart, and because of the lateness of its blossoming time, it shot forth all the more riotously its luxuriant foliage. It was June, and not May, with Agatha.

Mr. Tracey wrote that on the voyage over he had had ample time to think of all that had ever passed between them, and that more than ever was he convinced that God had created and kept them for each other. He begged her not to do violence to those feelings that he knew he had awakened in her heart, because of the false views she held concerning the incompleteness of his divorce; and expressed the hope that before they met again, Agatha, with her usually clear reasoning powers and independent judgment, would bring herself to look upon his marriage as not having been one in which God had joined together, but rather as one which man had impiously made, or rather ignorantly; not realising until too late that every element of a true marriage was

wanting. As he looked upon the separation, God had sundered the tie which man had unlawfully, in a moral point of view, created. And this was the way in which he closed his letter:—‘Two such natures as ours, once having been brought together, cannot be kept apart ; we would find each other if the deserts of Siberia and Sahara were put between us ; and if together, we would be happier in those deserts than in Paradise if separated. It is rare for twin souls to meet in this world :— that joy is left for eternity to most of the denizens of this earth. But we, my adored Agatha, must belong to each other for time, as well as eternity. I will not give you up for any unchristian ideas of what is right, and what is wrong ; you belong to me as much as if I already possessed you ; and Fate, which is the servant of Providence, will bring us together when God wills. In one year from the time I sailed, I am going back to you to claim you. I do not know how to wait for the time to pass away. The days already seem like months, and the nights like years. As each goes, I thank God as I would thank Him for a priceless gift. Sometimes in dreams I hold you in my arms, kissing your sweet eyes ; and when I awake to find it but a dream, I wish that I could sleep all time away until the hour when I can make my dreams reality. If you are not angry with me, Agatha, my darling Agatha, you will answer this letter. You could not be so cruel as to refuse to write to me. It would be as though you were in possession of a fountain, from the source of which a river gushed, (as in the lovely Syrian valley of Barada, where the Fejeh rushes in a torrent from the earth,) and should refuse to give me a drink if, travel worn and thirsty, were I to ask a draught from your hand. I am

far thirstier for a letter from you than ever was any desert traveller for the water of an oasis ; you are my oasis, do not refuse me that which my thirsty heart longs for. Write me ever so few lines, but let me see the dear writing that, since we made our translations together, sends a thrill to my heart, which is only equalled by those which your eyes and your touch awaken.'

And Agatha did answer the letter, but it was purely one of friendship. She wrote one that all the world might have seen. She told him of Mildred's health and happiness, and acknowledged that she now saw clearly that he had been right in insisting upon the separation. It was in every sense of the word a commonplace letter, for having once resolved to overcome the passion that had stealthily eaten its way to her life's centre, she was equally determined to write nothing that could feed the flame in Carroll Tracey's breast.

Monotonous days passed wearily away, each one seeming to leave Agatha's face more transparent, her eyes more full of soul, and her voice more deeply freighted with pathetic tenderness.

Her Aunt Hester, her father's sister, who resided with them, but who had been visiting relatives for nearly a year, now returned to make her preparations to go with them to Newport for the summer. Miss Hester Lee carried her age well ; still possessing so attractive a face that strangers often asked who the sweet-faced woman was, with an interest seldom shown in one who had numbered as many years as she had. Her brown hair, nearly as abundant as Agatha's, had in it a suggestion of that warm colour which Titian loved so well to paint on the heads of his voluptuously delineated forms,

and not one silken thread had as yet changed its colour. Her eyes, neither grey nor hazel, had the same rich hue in their lashes ; and in the eyebrows, which seemed darker than they were, because of the creamy whiteness of her skin, which had marvellously retained its freshness, although never suffused with colour, even in the warmest days of summer.

One morning, when Agatha had gone out, and Mr. Lee was sitting alone with his sister, he said,

‘ Hester, do you see any change in Agatha ? ’

‘ Yes, I think she is paler and thinner than I have ever seen her.’

‘ That is not the change I speak of. She is always thinner after the winter’s dissipation. I scarcely know how to describe it. She talks less, has lost a great deal of her earnestness, is listless and indifferent to all that is going on, is often abstracted—fairly lost at times in reveries. In short, there are a thousand and one little differences between Agatha as she was and as she is now. I feel perplexed and troubled about her.’

‘ I had not thought of feeling anxious,’ replied Aunt Hester. ‘ She has developed in character very rapidly during the last year—that kind of development which results from experiences that come sooner or later to all.’

‘ You do not fancy that she is in love, or any such nonsense ? ’ questioned Mr. Lee.

‘ No, I do not think she is in love ; but I think she has reached that stage in her life which brings with it the need of a warmer affection, a closer companionship than any she has yet enjoyed. In fact, I feel quite sure she is not in love, because it was only yesterday that she told me she had fully resolved she would

never marry, and no girl makes that resolution who is in love.'

'I am glad to hear you say so, for I had begun to suspect that there might be something of the sort. What do you think of a change of air for her?—to go to Europe for instance?'

'Charming; I wish you would take her; she has often expressed a wish to go, but you are so dependent upon your home comforts that we did not think you would ever propose it.'

'I have been selfish, I know, for I dread a sea-voyage more than I dread death; but I think we will arrange to cross either in July or August, when the sea is calmest, if you will go with us, Hester.'

'Of course I will. I would not let you and Agatha go without me if I could help it. I am very dependent upon you both for my happiness. I do hope that if Agatha ever should wish to marry you will not be so selfish as to oppose it. It is pretty hard to go through life a spinster.'

'She might do worse than remain a spinster. There are precious few happy marriages to my thinking in these days. She is so much like you, that I daresay she will never see anyone whom she will love well enough to marry.'

'God forbid!' exclaimed Aunt Hester fervently. 'God forbid that my experience should ever become hers.'

That day at dinner Mr. Lee broached the subject.

'What do you say about going to Europe this summer?' looking as if he felt quite sure of Agatha's answer; but to his surprise, she replied,

'I would like above all things to go abroad, but not this summer. That is quite out of the question.'

‘And why is it out of the question? I am sure there never has been, and never will be, a time when we can go as well.’

‘How can you hesitate for one moment?’ asked Aunt Hester.

‘I do not hesitate. I am perfectly decided in my own mind. I do not wish to go to Europe this year. Next summer we will talk about it,’ answered Agatha, with irritating coolness.

‘That is another thing. If you do not wish to go I shall not compel you to go, of course; but next summer I may not be able to take you,’ replied her father with an air of equal coolness.

‘I hope you will take a few days to think about it Agatha,’ pleaded her aunt. ‘You will be sure to regret your decision if you allow any whim to influence you.’

‘Am I in the habit of allowing myself to be influenced by whims, dear Aunt Hester?’ she answered, with a patient endurance of the reflection cast upon her, that once it would not have been in her nature to have borne so placidly.

‘I think you are extremely impulsive, my dear; and when one possesses such a temperament, one is very apt to repent at leisure all that one has allowed one’s self to do in haste.’

‘You must trust me that it is no whim this time, and that I have a very good reason for putting off going until next year, for, as I said at first, it is impossible for me to go this summer.’

Mr. Lee and his sister exchanged a meaning glance, and when Agatha had left the room, he said,

‘I think I have the clue.’

‘You are wiser than I then, for I have racked my brains in vain.’

‘I fear she is interested in some one, and will not leave until it is settled.’

‘Who can he be?’ asked Aunt Hester.

‘Some one whom she has met in Philadelphia this winter, I daresay. It can’t be Davenport, for he wrote me a touching letter telling me that he had met with all sorts of bad luck, and knowing that he had a liking for Agatha, I perfectly understand his meaning. Can Potten be the man?’

‘No, I am quite sure he is not.’

‘You ought to be able to ferret it out, Hester.’

‘Whether I can is another matter. However, when my suspicions are once aroused, I generally see as much as most people. She has kept her secret so well, that I had not even suspected that she had one. Should she give me her confidence, I could not betray it; but if I make any discoveries, you may be sure that you will hear of them.’

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT an exodus to Europe the summer brought! Mrs. Arthur Gray, Miss Lennox, Colonel Potten, and Mr. Jenkins went over in the same steamer. With them went a cousin of Mr. Atherton, on his mother's side, who belonged to an old Philadelphia family. Mr. Campbell Clawson was a beau of such distinction, that it was difficult to imagine how the wheels of society could turn in the absence of so important a leader from his post. He was a man who, without either much brains or much culture, had succeeded in making himself always in demand. If there was any gossip afloat, Mr. Clawson was sure to be the first to know it; if an engagement was pending, he always ferreted it out before the families interested spoke of it; no funeral was properly attended, no marriage auspiciously celebrated, no christening sufficiently consecrated, if he were not present. His ideas of his own importance were so exalted that had the sun left the world in darkness, it could not have caused a more depressing influence upon the earth's inhabitants than his departure from fashionable society would leave upon those who remained behind. Although of mature age, he went abroad for the first time, having had too great a regard for society to subject its members to the untold inconveniences that might arise from his absence. Looking up his old French grammar and other class-books, he

added to his collection a book of French phrases most in common use, hoping to polish his rusty French into a state of perfection that it had never yet attained. His last words to one of his friends—another leader, who had struggled as desperately as himself to drag the ponderous car of society—were,

‘If you find everything going at sixes and sevens without me, old boy, send for me and I will come back to you.’

By his directions, copies of the daily journals containing the list of passengers were sent to various friends in Boston and New York, whom he feared would otherwise be kept in ignorance of his departure ; and one of these Mr. Lee received at Newport. Opening it at the breakfast table, he found the list marked, also the following paragraph,

““Mr. Campbell Clawson of Philadelphia sails for Europe to-day in the *Cuba*. His numerous friends will regret his departure, and hope for his speedy return.””

‘Who could have sent me this?’ exclaimed Mr. Lee. ‘What do I care for Campbell Clawson, or whether he goes or stays? But I do care for being kept at home just when I wished to go abroad ; you were very unreasonable, Agatha.’

Her only answer was a sigh so long and quivering, half-suppressed as it was, that it touched her father’s heart.

‘Never mind, Agatha. I daresay you had a very good reason for not wishing to go ; only, when you can tell me what it is, my child, I will be glad to know.’

Poor Agatha! the very thought of telling her father, suffused her cheeks, her forehead even. She made no answer, and Aunt Hester changed the conversation.

That night Agatha was sitting at the same window in her chamber, where she had fallen asleep, dreaming of the ideal friendship that she coveted ; and now, sitting in the same chair, she recalled the vision that came to her in her dreams. As often as she had thought of it since, it had never come before her with such vividness as now ; awakened into new life as it was by the associations of the place. She held in her hand Carroll Tracey's second letter, which had arrived that day, and which she had read over and over until she knew by heart every eloquent sentence that it contained. Although the moonlight flooded the room, it was too dark to read it again, as she surely would have done if she could have seen the dear words on its pages ; but what need had she of written lines when the glowing flame of love had burned them in upon her heart ? There was no sound, other than the monotonous wash of the waves against the cliffs, the gentle rustling of the vine which gave out from the hearts of its blossoms the delicious perfume that filled the apartment, and the chirp of one lone cricket that went on as madly as if imprisoned within its little body were some lost soul, shut out from Paradise. Agatha thought of 'Bianca among the Nightingales.' She repeated,

They sing for spite,
They sing for hate, they sing for doom !
They'll sing and stun me in the tomb.

If the cricket would only stop ! but it sang on. She longed to be alone, for while the cricket sang she was not alone ; the shrill, piping voice shared her thoughts, and distracted her. Then the fancy came to her that the cricket was sent to distract her from the one subject that like a note of warning was sounding in her ears. At

last, the cricket chirped itself hoarse, and with one dreadful effort ceased its distracting cry. Then Agatha gave herself up to the memories of her dream. Again she walked the dusty high-way, hand clasped in hand with the one who in the vision had so carefully directed her steps, so tenderly cared for and protected her ; but now it was no stranger as before. Carroll Tracey guided her with unstained feet through the miry soil, his cool firm clasp held her hands ; his well-like eyes, in which she looked, reading in their unfathomable depths the love that she hungered for, and yet was ready to deny herself. Again she stood with him upon the mossy hills that in her dreams had seemed to touch the very stars ; and once more she felt the dewy freshness of his lips upon her forehead ; then he had gone, and though her heart called after him now, 'Come back to me !' as in her dream, she knew that between them lay the glacier which was to be her lonely road through life. How many times had she lived over in memory that dream, thankful that her naked feet still remained unstained !

'My dream has come to pass,' she said in her communings with herself. 'My dream has come to pass. Carroll Tracey *has* led me from the flat, dead level of my life, which seemed so aimless and so unsatisfactory, so hollow and so vain ; he has led me up on the beautiful heights where I dreamed that I was left. Even though my road be over the ice, and I walk it alone, still it is beautiful to have been so near the angels once in my life.' Then came to her the often-recurring thought, 'Are my feet unstained ?' In reply, she questioned 'Can God permit such happiness as has come to me to be coupled with wrong and guilt ? If it is wrong, why did it come to me ? I did not seek it. I did not

even dream that it was love. Even with the inexpressible bliss of knowing that he loves me, flooding and filling my heart, there is still room for the exquisite torture that comes to me in the recollection that I did love him before he was free in his own eyes to love me. Oh God ! that I should fall so low in my own esteem ! I, who never had one sentiment of pity, one word of compassionate excuse for those who were tempted—who, even now, could find it in my heart to despise the woman who is tempted in a grosser sense ! Can it be, as I have somewhere read, that when a creature loves much, the world and all its people, and all its laws, and ways, and opinions cease to exist, and are as though they had never been ? If this be so, if our instincts fail us, then we are tempted of God, and not of Satan.'

With such ever-recurring thoughts, there was little cause for wonder that Agatha's cheeks daily lost their roundness, and that the sharpening of her features and the hollowness of her eyes became more and more noticeable, bringing fresh anxieties to her father and her aunt.

The latter had frequently tried to lead Agatha to talk of herself, but always to no purpose ; although in her heart, Agatha longed with an unspeakable longing to unburthen herself to some one, who could understand the contending emotions which she felt were destroying her. This, she thought her Aunt Hester, whose life had been so void of experiences, could never do ; and more and more she shrank from having her carefully guarded secret even suspected.

One day in August, as they were sitting on the shaded verandah, Aunt Hester occupied with her needle-work,

and Agatha reading aloud, she came to the very passage that Carroll Tracey had copied—

Lift we our eyes to heaven ! Love greets us thence,
 Disrobed of all its earthly impotence ;
 Even human love : below still doomed to be
 Stronger than death, feebler than infancy.

Agatha's voice betrayed her emotion as she came so suddenly and unexpectedly upon the lines.

'That sentiment is as true as it is beautiful,' said her aunt. 'Stronger than death, yet feebler than infancy,' she repeated.

Agatha looked dreamily in the distance, suffering her hand to fall with the book in her lap, and leaning her head back against her chair.

'What are you thinking about, Agatha?' asked her aunt at last.

'I was thinking of last summer, or last autumn rather, when Colonel Potten and I had a talk on this very spot, and Frank and Mrs. Arthur Grey were carrying on a flirtation in the corner.'

'Ah,' thought Aunt Hester, 'at last I have a clue. Which can it be? Colonel Potten or Frank?' Before she had time to decide in favour of either, Agatha turned abruptly with the question,

'Aunt Hester, do you believe that it ever happened to a really good man to fall in love with a woman who was already married, or to a really good woman to find herself in love with a man who had a wife living?'

Aunt Hester looked up from her work, and gave Agatha a scrutinising gaze. As she met Agatha's brown eyes fixed searchingly upon her, her own eyes fell, and her always pale face flushed with colour.

'Why do you ask such a strange question, child?'

‘Partly because I was so rude to Mrs. Grey, then ; and because I have never had any charity for such people. Even if a woman has the misfortune to be married to a man whom she does not love, I think her convictions of the duty she owes him as a wife, should be strong enough to keep her from any manifestations of affection for another.’

‘I agree with you,’ replied Aunt Hester, ‘and there is not a doubt in my mind but that it would with a woman of principle, under all ordinary circumstances ; but I have known of cases where good men and good women—really and truly good in their principles and their intentions--have been thrown off their guard by some unusual combination of events, or by some unexpected occurrence, which has betrayed them into revealing emotions, that they have regretted during all their after lives ; and the memory of which, neither tears could drown nor time bury from their sight.’

‘Why does God permit such things to happen ? or rather, why does our Saviour so explicitly forbid divorce for any other cause but one ? I think there is much more sin for two people to live together where there is no love.’

‘At first thought you would seem to be right, and so you are in a superficial sense ; but think of all that a separation involves between married people who have children, and you will see the wisdom of making it no light nor easy thing to be divorced. When once the mistake of marrying an uncongenial temperament has been made, I think the burden should be borne uncomplainingly to the bitter end,’ said Aunt Hester ; breathing a long, long sigh, as she bent her head over her sewing again.

‘ You speak as feelingly as if you had known some such case, dear Aunt Hester.’

‘ I have known of just such a case.’

‘ I wish you would tell me about it. I was so very uncharitable, so bitter in my denunciations of Mrs. Grey’s conduct, that sometimes of late I have felt reproachful pangs, that, young and beautiful and giddy as she was, I did not try to influence her for good, instead of condemning her so unmercifully ; but Aunt Hester, it has always been my horror to see a married woman flirt, and the possibility of a good woman being interested in any man, excepting through friendship, if either had married ties, I could not even have dreamed of. Will you not tell me ? ’

Aunt Hester’s work had fallen in her lap, and she was looking as dreamily in the distance as ever Agatha had done. At last she spoke.

‘ Yes, dear, I will tell you all about it.’

The windows of the sitting-room opened on the piazza, and entering the invitingly cool and cosy apartment, Aunt Hester laid aside her work, while Agatha drew a low seat by the side of her aunt’s easy chair ; who, before she commenced her story, leaned over her, and kissing tenderly the up-turned face, said,

‘ It is not without pain that I shall recall these incidents, but if they are the means of benefiting you, I will not shrink from the suffering.’

CHAPTER VIII.

AUNT HESTER'S STORY.

'I ONCE had a friend with whom I was on the most intimate terms. I am sure my friend never had a secret from me, and this is how I came to know the circumstances that I am going to tell you. I am not violating any confidence in repeating it, for were she here now, she would say, "If my experience can be of any benefit to another, do not withhold it." In one way, at least, I can see how it may be of use to you; for when doubts of God's providence or of the wisdom of our Saviour's teachings creep into the mind, no one can foresee the result. My friend—let me see, what name shall I give her? for, of course, I can never tell you her true name. I will call her Henrietta. She once went to make a visit at the house of a married friend. This friend had married when quite young a man of much ability and worth, whom her father wished to have her marry. Henrietta found her friend very happy in her children, and devoted to their happiness. They were evidently of primary importance in the mother's eyes, as children are sure to be when the match has not been purely a love-match. Just as Henrietta's visit was drawing to a close, one of the children was taken down with scarlet fever, and she remained to assist in the care of the child; then, the husband was attacked, and one by one the remaining chil-

dren. Henrietta gladly stayed through all, for she felt no fear of contagion. The husband's case proved to be the most critical, but the anxieties of the mother were so centred upon her darlings that she did not realise this. Night after night Henrietta kept her place by the bedside of one or the other child, urging the wife to give more of her time to her husband. During these long and trying weeks, she became literally as one of the family. The husband learned to call upon her as he would have called upon a sister, and she came and went into his chamber as if he were her brother. "There is Horace calling me," the wife used to say, "he thinks I can be everywhere in the same moment. Do go and keep him quiet, for he is so cross since he began to convalesce that I am sure he will end by driving us all out of the house, if something is not done to amuse him." So Henrietta went as she was told, and very often took with her either flowers to brighten the room, or fruit to tempt the invalid's appetite. The eyes, that always brightened at her approach, repaid her a thousand fold for any patience that she had to exercise. Day after day she read by the hour to the convalescent, as he grew better, Browning, Tennyson, or Shelley; and as he gradually recovered his strength, conversation took the place of books, and more and more she wondered at the rich stores of information that he possessed, at the varied culture of his mind, and the seemingly exhaustless fund of his learning. No murmurs nor complaints escaped his lips at his wife's evident neglect; more than once Henrietta was on the brink of remonstrating with her concerning it; but she wisely resisted her impulse seeing that any radical change would be impossible, as her children had so long occupied the first place in her affec-

tions. At last, all the convalescents were able to leave their respective chambers, and once more Henrietta made preparations for departure. No, I must go back and tell you of something that happened before the husband was able to leave his room ; he was sitting in his easy chair by the open window—for it was a sultry night in August—when he called his wife to come into his chamber. She was occupied with one of the children, and Henrietta was sitting by the bed of another, telling some wonderful fairy story to the little boy, who was her especial pet, and whose nightly custom upon retiring was to demand one of her. The wife said to her, “I wish you would go and see what he wants,” so she made a speedy ending of her story and went. There was no light in the room, but that of the moon, which was struggling through the clouds, and everything was dim and shadowy. As she approached him, he said, “You look in your trailing white dress like an angel that has floated down to earth on some errand of mercy.” He drew her to the window, saying, “I want you to look up to the heavens that you surely came from, and tell me whether you ever saw anything more beautiful, in heaven or earth, than the scene before you.” Between them and the horizon lay the ocean, calm as a lake ; yet, with throbbing bosom, as if some gigantic heart were reposing beneath. Clouds of intense blackness were grouped in fantastic forms against the back-ground of pale sky, their ragged edges bordered with opalescent light ; for the moon had risen behind them, and every now and then revealed herself through the openings. Henrietta seated herself on the chair, which he motioned her to take, and, leaning one arm upon the window frame, looked out on the weird spectacle, with her heart

too full for words. Sheet lightnings were flashing in the sky, and every now and then the mutterings of far distant thunder echoed through the profound stillness. The night was solemnly, grandly still. After a long pause, the husband said, "Tell me of what you are thinking, will you not?" She answered, "I was wondering what heaven could be like, when earth is so much more than beautiful." There was another pause, and then he laid his hand lightly upon the arm that rested upon the window, and said, "I shall have a great deal to tell you when we reach that other world." That was all. A day or two after that, Henrietta was gathering her books together, and her drawing materials, and the husband asked her if she would not give him one of her sketches. She gave him her portfolio to choose from. He selected a fancy sketch. A young girl leaning against a window, looking thoughtfully upwards, with more of heaven than earth in her face, so full of all holy aspirations was it. He said, "I have selected this, because it reminds me of the magic night in which you seemed to me to have floated down from heaven to earth, to minister to me. I wonder after you have gone, whether you will ever think of me as I will think of you." "There will not be a day," she answered, "in which I will not think of you and your wife, and wish myself back with you." "That is not what I want," he said impatiently; "I wish to feel sure before we part that you will think of me as I shall think of you—I mean, as of one who if fate or destiny had brought to you earlier in life, that there might have been that true union in which soul is fused with soul, mind blended with mind, so that two would literally have been made one; but good God! what have I said," for he saw that Henrietta shrank away from him,

shocked and terrified. She gathered up her books and drawings, and left the room, without making any answer. The next evening she was sitting quite alone, when he came up to her. She had been utterly confounded by the sudden revelation of his feelings towards her the previous day, and now she feared his presence. He said, "Can you ever forgive me for what I said to you yesterday? Believe me, but for my illness I never would have betrayed my weakness. Now, you must not refuse to listen to my exculpation ; you have seen how good my wife is—what an excellent mother and housekeeper ; and you have seen that as far as any sympathy—companionship—what shall I call that nameless affinity that blends two souls in one?—well, you have seen that as far as that goes, I might as well have married that Martha in Scripture, who was so careful about many things that she could not attend to the interests of her own soul. I do assure you that my very soul is imperilled for want of that degree of affection which my wife never has felt, and never will feel for me. This and my weakness, after my long illness, is all the excuse I have to offer ; but I implore you to forget what I said yesterday—to restore me to the same footing that I was on with you before—not to look at me so coldly, and I will never give you any reason to regret it. Tell me that you will ?" She replied, "I will upon one condition." "Name it," he said. "Upon the condition that you promise never again to address one word to me that you would not be willing to have your wife stand by and hear." He replied, "I promise willingly. You are quite right--this is as it should be." When Henrietta went to her room that night, she asked herself why he had not fallen in her esteem—why it was that she felt him to be dearer to her than ever ?

While she regretted the loss of the friendship that she felt might have always existed between them if he had not disclosed his love for her, she was compelled to acknowledge to herself that that love was very precious to her. She recalled how once when they had been chatting and laughing about the requirements of friendship, she had said that she should not be exacting ; he had replied, “And *I* should be very exacting, if *you* were that friend. I should want a great deal more than you could ever give me—more, I mean, than you would be willing to give me ; but still, I am grateful for ever so little.” She had not thought much of this at the time, but now it all came back to her, with many, many other things that were full of deep meaning—that had a new significance. Why did she not hate the man for daring to say such words to her!—for presuming but to lay his hand upon her arm, the evening when she had sat beside him in the window? She asked herself if another man lived whose course she would not have resented had he attempted such liberties in words and acts. Then, why had this man but become dearer to her?—so dear, that it seemed to her now, that when the morrow came and she should leave him, it would be like going out of Paradise into a desert? “Am I then one of those wretched beings who enter a family but to bring estrangement between husband and wife?—one of those false friends who smile deceitfully, and profess affection for the wife, while robbing her of her husband’s love?” She thanked God that she was not such a one—that as far as she was concerned, she could that moment go to her friend, and say to her, that she wished her to know all that was in her heart—that she could tell her just how dear her husband was to her, and say that even if she had the power, she would

not rob of her one thought. She longed to say to her, "Let me but have the crumbs that fall from your table unregarded ; they are all that I desire, they would satisfy me—but I will not take them without your knowledge and consent." She reasoned in this way, and she really believed that her reasoning was just to both herself and her friend ; that such relations might be sustained, if her friend did but sanction them. But the plant that had sprung up so suddenly in her heart, and which, if no light but the cold lunar light of friendship had fallen upon, would have been of slow growth, had in the fostering rays of the sun of love grown like the gourd of Scripture. It had already enwound itself with every fibre of her being ; so that on the morrow when the hour of parting approached, she was like one who stands upon the shore in sight of the ship which goes down before her eyes, bearing from her sight her most precious treasure. Her heart felt like lead within her, her nerves were strung to their highest pitch of endurance, her head seemed bound round with iron bands that compressed her brain, and tortured her. The end of all time seemed to have come. The little children whom she had loved so dearly were nothing to her now—they clung around her, loth to have her go ; but all her affection for them seemed for the moment to have been swallowed up in the one absorbing, intense infatuation that had seized hold of her with demoniacal power drifting her along the current of her destiny. It was but twenty-four hours since she had thanked God, that whatever his feelings were for her, she had not one thought even in her heart for him, that she need to blush for. How terrible was the fall from that pinnacle on which she had placed herself above him ! When the moment of parting arrived, her friend dis-

covered that she could not leave her household duties to accompany her to the train, and begged her to excuse her and suffer her husband to go with her, who would be better for the little drive, she said. So they found themselves in the carriage together, and Henrietta was so successful in her efforts to subdue and keep down all emotion, that she seemed more like a statue than a living human being. "I see you will never forgive me," he said, mistaking the cause of her silence and her frigid demeanour. His voice was so full of pathos, that she felt the tears filling her eyes, and as they rolled down over her cheeks she found the stony hardness of her heart melting away, the painful rigidity of her muscles relaxing. He continued, "What would I not give could I only succeed in once again establishing our former relations?—could I make you forget my wretched imbecility! Remember, and let this memory plead for me, how ill I had been, and how in my illness you were the only one who seemed to care whether I lived or died, until at last you were always in my thoughts, both sleeping and waking. But no, it is not possible for you to understand such love as I have given to you—asking nothing but permission to love you. How can I endure what my life will be to me after once having known you, when you have gone out of it, if I have to feel that I have lost your respect, your friendship? I shall be tempted like the man of old to curse God and die!" Every word struck her heart as if a knife were plunged into it. Then a species of exaltation came over her, such as a martyr might feel, who in the glory of being called to suffer for the faith finds transport in the suffering. "Shall I part with him, hypocrite that I would be, and not tell him first that I share his pain?—

shall I leave him to think that I have less to bear than he has?—that I am indulging a righteous pride?—the pride of the Pharisee, who thanks God that he is better than other men? The sin lies not in the love that we feel for each other, but in the indulgence of that love in a way which would wrong those who have claims upon us. He shall see my heart once, and then we will each help the other to that strength that we will both need for the fulfilment of our duties, and which God, who brought us together, will not refuse to give us." She but turned and looked into his eyes. Not a word was spoken; not a word was necessary. She had drawn her glove upon one hand; he took the ungloved one, reverently, as if it had been the hand of an angel, and just touched it with his lips. Then she spoke. "I was going to say something to you," she said, "but after all it is better unsaid. I will wait until we meet in that world, where, as you told me the other day, I shall have a great deal to tell you." "You are right," he answered, "it is better to wait, for I would not have you say anything to me here that you could ever wish unsaid." They had reached the station, but the train had not yet arrived, nor was there anyone in the waiting-room. They sat down side by side, and he reached his hand to clasp hers, but she withdrew it. He saw the colour come into her face, as she felt the magnetism of his touch but for that one instant, and the weakness of human nature triumphed as he felt his power over her. He whispered, "Tell me what you were going to say. It will be so much for me to remember after we have parted; and think how long—how very long the years will be before we meet in another world." "Not so long," she replied, "as those would be spent

in eternity, vainly regretting not having resisted the temptation to say what I wished to say here. But if we both make a right use of this discipline, which I know God has sent to us—not only to show us our own weakness as well as to strengthen our powers of resistance of evil, but to develop that in our natures which is His sweetest, best, and highest gift—we shall not fail to meet in a world where there will be no sin in expressing what we feel for each other.” “Will you be mine there?” he asked. “I will,” she answered, “if we are found worthy of eternity.” The sharp whistle of the locomotive was heard, and directly the train came thundering on. As they stood in the dark little waiting-room alone, a mad impulse came over him, as he afterwards told her, to hold her just once to his heart—just once to kiss her on her lips—but resisting it, as her words came back to him: “If we are found worthy,” he said, “we must have it to remember that I have never kissed you, not even on your cheek.” They held each other’s hand in a lingering pressure, and then they parted; while, as she learned afterwards, he stood looking after the train that bore her from him until the last vestige of the locomotive’s curling smoke disappeared in the level distance. After this came Henrietta’s remorse, not perhaps that very day, nor the next, but when the strange exaltation that had given her spirit wings, as it were, lifting her above everything earthly, had disappeared and left her to face the matter-of-fact occurrences in the broad light of common sense, she suffered such pangs as only those can feel who have tried to do their duty conscientiously to God and their fellow men, and who have suddenly fallen short where they have felt themselves to be most secure. She could not forget the wild longing she had

felt, at the moment of parting, that he would only once take her in his arms, only once kiss her, as those who love kiss when they part ; and the degradation of soul which she experienced over this memory seemed to her like a serpent eating its way into her heart. Never could she be thankful enough that in that moment he had been capable of the god-like strength he had manifested ; as never could she forget that she owed to him the memory that he never had held her in an embrace ; for it was not until they met once more, that she was made happy by hearing from his lips that it was her words which had made him so strong.'

Aunt Hester shaded her eyes with one hand as she ceased speaking, supporting her head, for her elbow rested on the table by which she was sitting.

'Oh, Aunt Hester, do tell me more,' said Agatha. 'Tell me when and how they met again ; do dear Aunt Hester.' Then she saw two large tears plash upon her aunt's hand, which lay in her lap, and she said, 'No, if it distresses you to recall these memories, I will not be so selfish as to ask it ; but Aunt Hester, I can never thank you as I would, I can never find words to tell you what this history has done for me. I believe that you have saved my life,' and Agatha laid her head in her aunt's lap, lifting her hand and pressing it caressingly to her face.

There was a silence of some minutes, then Aunt Hester resumed her story.

'Years passed before they met again, and wherever Henrietta went she carried with her her secret, as one might carry a coffin which could not be placed out of sight, because of some prescribed penance. When they did meet, both had been so purified by the fiery trial they had been called upon by God to undergo, that they

were able to meet as two should meet who were so situated. Every year upon the anniversary of the day when her eyes had spoken to him of the hunger and thirst that was in her soul for that love which life had denied her, she received a letter from him ; but the letter only contained some verse of Scripture, or a quotation from some author, which embodied the sentiments of his heart towards her.

‘One letter contained only these lines,

Our pangs are infinite as is our love,
And infinite as both will be the glory
Of overmastering both.

‘Another time,

How nobly shows our virtue
When the heart breaks in its exercise !

‘And again,

““There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man ; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able ; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.””

‘I am sure that through it all,’ continued Aunt Hester, ‘no one suspected the existence of the cross they bore, as I am also sure they never wished to change their cross for any other ; for with all the suffering, there was that sweetest of compensations that comes from a knowledge that one is so dearly loved, even if so widely separated. No poet has ever sung truer words than that it is sweeter to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.’

‘Do tell me, Aunt Hester, where he is now-- what has become of him.’

‘He is in eternity, waiting for one who hopes to realise there, all that has been to her here only a dream, when God sees fit to restore them to each other.’

Agatha pressed her aunt’s soft and still beautiful hand to her lips, kissing it over and over.

‘I do not know how to thank you for telling me this story ; if you only could know *why* I thank you so much,’ she said.

Aunt Hester felt that Agatha’s heart would soon open to her, but taking no notice of what she said, she continued, ‘I commenced by saying that when once the mistake had been made of marrying one of an uncongenial temperament, I thought the burden ought to be borne uncomplainingly to the end of life. Of course I do not mean that there are no exceptions ; but I speak in general terms. In this instance, Henrietta’s friend had made the mistake of marrying to please a father whose every wish was her law ; she had not known what love was beyond filial love ; and she loved her husband as she would have loved a brother ; satisfied, because she knew no higher nor deeper love. Her husband’s love for her was first chilled, and finally destroyed, by her indifference to him. He was the only apparent sufferer ; but she suffered, in that her nature had no opportunity for that development which married life brings, when the love that unites the husband to the wife and the wife to the husband, is that alone which constitutes marriage. Still, her happiness was so centred in her children, that she felt no loss. Had she ever met a man who possessed for her that power of attraction which her husband failed to possess for her, then she would have been conscious of the capabilities of her nature for a more exalted passion than any that had ever been re-

vealed to her. As it was, she remained in ignorance of *all* that life is capable of conferring ; and was happy in that ignorance. Now, we will suppose that her husband had insisted upon a separation, or even expressed to her his desire to have one ; how unhappy it would have made her, and consequently her children ! What a scandal would have been associated with the two selfish beings who could plan and carry out steps to secure their happiness at such a fearful cost ! No, rest assured I am right ; in most cases the mistake should never be acknowledged, even to each other ; certainly not publicly. But Mrs. Arthur Grey's case is not a parallel one, I know ; she has no children ; her husband is intemperate, and lately I have heard that he is drinking himself into the grave. It is said she has been sent for by his mother to come abroad on account of his situation, his physicians saying that he cannot last through the summer. I hope——'

‘Aunt Hester,’ said Agatha, interrupting her, and looking straight into her eyes, ‘Aunt Hester, you know I am not thinking of Mrs. Arthur Grey. You know that it is because of an experience of my own that I feel so grateful to you. Let us have no concealments between us, other than the one of identity ; you have told me your history, and I will tell you mine.’

‘My history, child !’ was all that Aunt Hester said, the blood fading from her very lips while she pressed both hands tightly over her heart, as if Agatha had struck her there a mortal blow, in thus revealing that she knew what Aunt Hester had always concealed from every eye save that of the All-Seeing One.

‘Do you regret it ?’ said Agatha. ‘It is as safe with me as mine will be with you. I do not ask to know

more than you have told me. You have shown me that such love comes unbidden, unsought ; that if properly controlled, it not only interferes with no rights of others, but may be made the means of one's own spiritual advancement ; that the sin is not in feeling that attraction, but in yielding to it. Tell me that you do not regret it ; for Aunt Hester, I never loved you before as I love you now ; you have given me back what I thought I had lost for ever—my self-respect. I know now that I am worthier, than if I had had no temptations to resist.'

Aunt Hester kissed Agatha very tenderly, and answered,

‘I cannot and do not regret anything that has been instrumental in producing such an end. I am more than repaid for the torture that it still is to me to recall these events. I call it torture ; but it is an exquisite torture.’

‘And now,’ said Agatha, ‘I can tell you everything. How I have longed to unburthen my heart to some one ! I have even wished I were a Roman Catholic, that I might go to a priest and learn from him whether this ever-growing, wild, idolatrous love, that I feel for one who has married another, is as sinful in the sight of God as it is in my own ; but now I feel that I no longer need to blush as I have over the faintest memory of it.’

Agatha spoke with perfect calmness, but with great earnestness ; and her face had in it that transfiguration which strong feeling brings to the plainest features, endowing them with the beauty of the soul. She continued,

‘I am willing never to see him again in this world—never to hear the sound of his voice—more than willing.

I am eager to do all that duty requires of me, except to give up the conviction that I am as dear to him as he is to me. I would rather die a martyr's death, than lose my faith in this conviction. While it lasts, and I feel it will last, I can endure the separation. All that I want is to feel sure that we will belong to each other in eternity.'

Her face was luminous with the heavenly light that glowed in her eyes. As a sunbeam streamed through the vines and rested upon her head, it seemed to radiate from it like the rays of light that encircle the faces of saints and angels in the pre-Raphaelite pictures.

' You will have to *live* the life of a martyr, Agatha, which is even harder than to die one,' said her aunt. ' With such love as is in your heart for one who belongs to another, death would be a mercy, even though he came to you with sword and flames ; but death is an angel that takes his own time to release us ; or rather, the time of his Master. He comes not at our call, and he appears where he is least welcome. There are many living martyrs in our day ; few who are called upon to die as such. Tell me, dear, how such an experience ever came to you.'

So Agatha told her aunt all that she could tell, without revealing Carroll Tracey's identity ; and then said,

' Now let us promise never to allude again to what has passed between us this morning. We cannot tell each other more than we have—we must not if we could. Am I not right ? '

' Answer me one question,' said Aunt Hester. ' Is it because of this experience that you refused to go to Europe this summer ? '

‘ It is. He is in Europe. When he returns we will go.’

‘ You were right, my child, not to go. I understand all now, although I have no idea who he is.’

The summer passed away; Agatha and her aunt were more to each other than they had ever been before.

Always Aunt Hester’s face wore its sweet expression — a blending of chastened happiness and a wistful anticipation of all that was waiting for her in the beyond; while Agatha’s troubled conscience set at rest, the ghost of remorse exorcised, her face regained its serene expression, while her thoughtful eyes held in them ‘ the secret of a happy dream she did not care to tell.’

CHAPTER IX.

MEANTIME Narraganset had been as gay as Newport had been pronounced dull that summer.

Mrs. Arthur Grey, who was staying with the Dexters at —— House, seemed to have grown desperate, since the reported engagement of Frank Mortimer to Mildred was no longer denied ; for she 'flirted right and left,' totally regardless of appearances or of gossip, until her departure for Europe, where she was summoned on account of her husband's illness. Mrs. Dexter exercised her usual judicious control over her husband, who, however, managed his affairs on the sly so successfully, that no one suspected his (supposed) temporary weakness for Mrs. Barlow had progressed into an affair of more consequence. Mrs. Grundy's time was fully occupied in canvassing the merits of the various flirtations between the unmarried couples, as to how far they transcended the bounds of propriety ; and as to which of them might end in marriage, and which never would ; but little cared the participants whether Mrs. Grundy approved or condemned. There were abundant bits of gossip floating around ; no end of ill-natured comments and jests about the married and the unmarried, the middle-aged and the young ; but 'the little blonde,' Mrs. Barber, carried off the palm in the way of being made the subject of scandal. Day after

day, the dowagers (irreverently called 'the gossips') assembled to compare notes, as one rumour after another was started on its round. Morning after morning she walked on the sands, or sat on the rocks that bordered the sea, with her new admirer, Mr. Shelby Smith, whom she had introduced as her cousin, but who had been pronounced by those conversant with her family history to be only a cousin of the remotest degree, such as the Scotch claim—of the twentieth remove, at least. They rode, or drove, or sailed together so constantly, that Mr. Barber was quoted as the most indulgent of husbands, by wives wishing to emulate her, and denounced as an idiot by those who had no opportunity to test the soundness of mind of their lords and masters.

If a committee had been appointed to watch their movements, no stricter surveillance could have been kept over them than was that instituted by the Misses Fortescue; two maiden sisters, whose interest in the affairs of others could in no way be accounted for, save by the supposition that they had no resources of any description within themselves.

One morning, when a group of ladies were seated in one corner of the drawing-room, Miss Fortescue entered breathless,

'What do you think? Emma Barber is sitting down on the rocks with her *cousin*, and he has his arm around her, you can all see for yourselves if you like. I never saw such shameless goings on in my life,' and Miss Fortescue fairly hissed the word 'cousin' from between her teeth.

There was a regular stampede for the window. There they sat, in full sight, side by side.

‘Really, I think you are mistaken,’ said Mrs. Dexter. ‘He has his arm above her, not around her.’

‘Yes, it is,’ persisted Miss Fortescue. ‘I saw him squeezing her up to him, as I came along. There’s nothing going on that escapes me. But you will see more than this if you will come with me to-night over to the —— House. We are going, Jane and I, to see for ourselves all the billing and cooing that goes on every night in the dark corner of the back piazza. Mrs. Hill’s maid told my Stephanie that she had never seen anything to equal it.’

‘Hush! you don’t say so: of course I will go. We will make up a party and take them by surprise,’ answered one of the ladies. ‘Come, Mrs. Dexter,’ you must be one of us, and Mrs. Owen too, for it will be such fun to catch them. You know we can go ostensibly to hear the music.’

‘I have no objections to going over to hear the music,’ replied Mrs. Dexter, who, being a politic woman, had no idea of committing herself out and out to the proposed arrangement.

When evening came, there was a slight mist that threatened to turn into a drenching fog. This cooled the ardour of the ladies, and only two sallied out, the sisters Fortescue. Waiting until Mrs. Barber had disappeared, they proceeded, as they supposed, to follow her. In a short time they returned, reporting that their courage had given out when they came in sight of the two, whom they found sitting in ‘the dark corner,’ described by the French maid, Stephanie, for Mr. Shelby Smith’s giant form had so loomed up through the fog that they had turned back, not being quite pre-

pared to confront him, as they must have done had they continued.

‘But we saw his arm around Mrs. Barber, didn’t we Jane?’ said Miss Fortescue.

‘Certainly we did, and we saw him kiss her, or thought we did, didn’t we Anna?’

Miss Fortescue not quite prepared to endorse this statement, after a preparatory clearing of the throat, answered, ‘I wasn’t quite sure that he kissed her, but Jane thought he did.’

‘Shameful! abominable! outrageous!’ were some of the exclamations that escaped the listeners.

‘You must not repeat this, for you will get me in an awful scrape if you do. I was told the other day that Mr. Smith said he would call “the gossips” to account, if any of their stories reached his ears.’

‘Gossips! I like that. He called us gossips did he? Oh, the wicked wretch! It would take some one besides Shelby Smith to frighten me, if I am a gossip,’ said Miss Fortescue.

At this moment, Mrs. Barber entered and joined the group.

‘It is so disagreeable on the piazza? the fog is growing thicker and thicker,’ she said.

Miss Fortescue bridled, the word ‘gossips’ still nettled her.

‘Disagreeable on the piazza?’ said she. ‘Why, when Jane and I saw you a few moments ago, we thought you seemed to be having a most agreeable time.’

‘And so I was, until this mist came up,’ answered Mrs. Barber innocently. ‘Look at my new grenadine; it is ruined.’

Miss Jane Fortescue smiled grimly, and Miss Fortescue said, 'It does look very much tumbled,' glancing around to see if the ladies appreciated her mild joke.

When Mrs. Barber and her draggled grenadine had disappeared—for, incensed by the looks and tones of the two spinsters, she left the room—then Jane Fortescue said, 'How could you say what you did, Anna? I declare, I never will trust you again.'

'Trust me? Well, that is comical. Why there is not a servant in the house who is not talking about them. When you place any trust in me, I am not the one to betray it, but ——'

'I am only afraid that you will get us both into some trouble; for now, of course she will tell Shelby Smith that it was you and I who followed them over to the —— House.'

'I never thought of that. They did see us evidently, for you know they moved their chairs as we approached, and I thought Mr. Smith was going to get up and come towards us.'

The bulletin of news that grew out of the Misses Fortescue's reconnaissance spread like wild-fire. The next morning every one in the house was talking of the scandal. It could not be denied that the intimacy between Mrs. Barber and Shelby Smith had exceeded the bounds of propriety; for had not the Misses Fortescue seen the imprudent woman sitting in his lap, with both arms around his neck, and kissing him over and over? So do stories grow in a single night in the hot-house air of a watering-place.

In vain some of the ladies, less given to gossip, asserted that Miss Fortescue had never been a friend of Mrs. Barber, whose superior attractions had inspired

envy in her heart when they were both younger; and one, more charitable than wise, quoted Victor Hugo's words '*L'envie est une bonne étoffe pour faire un espion;*' but still the story grew, until at last a large majority of the ladies in the house turned a cold shoulder to Mrs. Barber. When she joined any circle it was the signal for the uprising and disappearance of several of the ladies. All this occurred before Mr. Campbell Clawson's departure for Europe early in August; and with his usual benevolence, always ready to be exerted in behalf of any distinguished member of polite society, he endeavoured to turn the tide in her favour, by giving her the benefit of his countenance.

'Your character will suffer next,' said Miss Fortescue. 'I know I would not be seen with her after all that has occurred.'

'If my character gave me as much anxiety as yours seems to give you, I would get rid of it as soon as possible,' he answered. 'Come, Miss Fortescue, remember that charity begins at home, and let him that is without sin cast the first stone.'

Miss Fortescue, who had not reached her mature age (mature for one still in the matrimonial field) without having had some escapades, wondered whether any of them had reached Mr. Clawson's ears, a saffron flush suffusing her face, as one of them recurred to her which she felt sure he knew of.

There was little else talked of for a time other than this latest and spiciest bit of gossip yet set afloat by the two spinsters, notwithstanding Mr. Clawson made brave efforts to rake up long buried affairs in order to divert their minds from his *protégée*. It must be confessed that Mrs. Belcher was among those who were

naughty enough to find satisfaction in Mrs. Barber's discomfiture. After the lapse of two or three weeks—the scouts that were sent out from time to time bringing back fresh fuel to fan the flames—she happened to mention the scandal to her friend, Mrs. Hill, one evening, while sitting with her in her parlour at the —— House.

'Why she seems to be a rival of our gay widow here,' said Mrs. Hill.

'Whom do you mean?' asked Mrs. Belcher.

'Mrs. Barlow. Is it possible that you have not heard how every one in the house is talking about her and Mr. Dexter?'

'Lucy Barlow! Mr. Dexter!' exclaimed Mrs. Belcher. 'Why I can hardly believe it possible. This is the most gossiping place in the world. It was only this morning that Lucy Barlow and I had a long talk about Mrs. Barber's imprudences; and she said much that she would not have said if she had been guilty of any similar ones.'

Mrs. Hill arose, saying, 'Excuse me for one moment,' as she entered her bed-room. Then, almost immediately returning, she said,

If you will follow me into my children's room through mine, I will show you whether Mrs. Barlow is as discreet as you think; but be careful, do not speak or make any noise, for it would disturb them.'

Mrs. Belcher followed Mrs. Hill, feeling confident that the latter had mistaken Mrs. Barber for Mrs. Barlow. They groped their way along the darkened room, and reached the window, the shutters of which were closed; a faint light visible through the partially closed slats.

'There!' whispered Mrs. Hill. 'What do you say now?'

Mrs. Belcher peeped between the slats, long enough to feel convinced that, whoever they were, there was no excuse for the familiarities that she witnessed ; but the shadows were so heavy, the corner so obscure, that she could not convince herself of the identity of the parties. Mr. Dexter and Shelby Smith were both large men, Mrs. Barlow and Mrs. Barber both rather short and well formed, and both dressed in black.

‘ It must be Mrs. Barber and Shelby Smith,’ she said, ‘ and you have mistaken them for Lucy Barlow and Mr. Dexter. I feel so very mean to be watching any one.’

‘ Ask your maid, who has seen them often on moonlight nights,’ said Mrs. Hill.

‘ I remember Alphonsine did say Mrs. Barlow was the woman, but she often gets names wrong, and I thought she meant Mrs. Barber. I reproved her, and told her not to come to me with any more gossip. I never allow my maids to repeat any stories to me. Not for a moment did I dream that Lucy Barlow was such a woman ! It is my punishment for having helped to circulate the scandal about Mrs. Barber, whom I detest.’

The whispering, or other sounds, seemed to disturb the two, for they arose and walked away, arm-in-arm.

‘ I came here to see them,’ said Mrs. Belcher, ‘ in order that I might convince you that you were doing my friend injustice ; and now, I am vexed that I did not remain in ignorance ; or rather that I have found Mrs. Barber to be innocent ; and still more vexed with myself that I am so unjust to her as not to be willing to have her vindicated.’

‘ I do not think it is your duty to vindicate her at the expense of your friend,’ said Mrs. Hill. ‘ She is just as bad I have no doubt.’

‘But it is my duty to vindicate her, without exposing my friend,’ answered Mrs. Belcher, ‘and that, I am compelled to do, for I daresay I first set the ball in motion by repeating what Alphonsine had told me. It is the first piece of gossip I have ever meddled with, and I have only myself to blame for the humiliation it has brought me.’

So Mrs. Belcher returned in a most crest-fallen condition. She found a circle of ladies bobbing their heads together, their tongues clattering, and their eyes beaming. Miss Fortescue was in their midst, narrating, not for the first time, how on her way back from one of the cottages, she had taken a roundabout way, accompanied by her nephew, and how they had turned the corner suddenly upon Mrs. Barber and Shelby Smith, and that she was almost lying in his arms with her head leaning on his shoulder, but that both sprang to their feet and walked away together, so expeditiously that they had actually arrived at the hotel before Miss Fortescue and her nephew; who found them sitting on the piazza, just as if nothing had happened, and behaving with the utmost propriety.

Mrs. Belcher listened to the close. Then she said,

‘I am extremely sorry to spoil such a good story—more sorry than you can ever know. I have just returned from the —— House, and I saw all that Miss Fortescue describes, but the persons were not Mrs. Barber and Mr. Smith; and more than this, there has been a mistake from the first. Mrs. Barber is entirely innocent of giving any ground for this especial scandal.’

‘Who is the woman then?’ asked one and another.

‘That will never pass my lips,’ answered Mrs. Belcher. For the next few days gossip was rife as to who the

individuals could be ; but as the corner was never again occupied, no farther discoveries were made in that direction.

Mrs. Dexter remained in happy ignorance of her husband's complicity ; venturing the opinion that whoever they were they must belong to that fast set in New York, with whom no people that are in the best society ever willingly allow themselves to be mixed up in any way.

Mr. Marston, who occasionally spent a Sunday at Narraganset, said to Mrs. Belcher after hearing of the *dénouement* upon his next visit,

' You have let a fine opportunity slip for revenging yourself upon Mrs. Barber. Don't you remember that I told you all things come to those who know how to wait ? Why did you spoil the fun by setting them straight ? '

' Because I never could have had any respect for myself if I had not ; and I value self-respect more than revenge. Then again, I really believe that to return good for evil is the best kind of revenge. I sometimes have thought though, that it is just as wicked a satisfaction in the sight of God, when you do it for revenge, as the doing of an injury.'

' I do not agree with you ; but I have seen enough of the workings of Providence, and how good is brought out of evil, to feel more than willing to leave all my private grudges to be settled for me. " God's mills grind slowly, but they grind surely," you know ; all their wheels work together for good to those who love goodness, and they work woe to the wicked.'

' *La vengeance est boiteuse ; elle vient à pas lents, mais elle vient,*' quoted Mrs. Belcher.

‘ Nothing truer; and you have seen that Miss Lee was not hurt by the slander. She carried the contradiction in her face. I think I never saw a purer face than hers. If I ever do marry, the woman of my choice will be just such a woman as she is.’

‘ Ah, Mr. Marston, when you marry, you will surely marry a widow; for men always do just what they protest they will not; and I have heard you say that you never could love a woman who had ever even fancied herself in love before.’

As if in confirmation of this prediction, Mr. Marston soon after became one of Mrs. Barlow’s most devoted attendants; and before the season was over, conjectures were rife as to the probable result.

The news of Frank Mortimer’s marriage with the divorced wife of Carroll Tracey afforded a subject for farther comment, coupled with rumours that Paul Howard and Mrs. Matthews had carried a flirtation to such lengths at Nahant, that Mr. Matthews had forbidden his wife to hold any communication with him.

What with these topics, the various flirtations, the mystery of the affair at the —— House (the participants in which remained undiscovered), and the reported imprudences of many others, the summer ended in a jubilee of scandal and spicy tales, which so gladdened the hearts of the dowagers (spitefully called ‘ the gossips ’) that they were in the best possible humour with themselves, each other, and all the world.

CHAPTER X.

AGATHA might well thank her Aunt Hester for having confided to her the romance of her life ; for by it she came to look upon her own experience more leniently. The struggle that had so worn upon her, threatening to destroy her, sooner than to end by the subjugation of her affections, was at last happily over. Gradually her face recovered its roundness, and her step its light, elastic tread. Although her brown eyes still retained their dreamy languor, the troubled, perplexed, wearied look was gone.

Faithfully, once a month, Carroll Tracey continued to write ; and Agatha answered all his letters ; but they were not such answers as his heart craved. A sister might have written every line that was in them to a brother ; and Carroll wished for no sisterly love from Agatha. At last, another spring came around, and the month approached in which Mr. Tracey had written that he intended to return. Agatha named the same month to cross with her father and aunt ; and they made their preparations to sail in June, and to remain several years abroad. While Agatha's resolute determination to avoid meeting Carroll Tracey led her to take this course, she was not without hope that the steamers might pass each other on their respective ways. She felt that it would be something to her heart to have seen the ship that contained one who was so dear to her.

The last letter that she received from him before sailing, was dated at Bologna, and written in the month of May. He wrote, 'Do you remember, in conversation with you, I once told you of a dream I had, which made such an impression on me that it frequently recurred to my thoughts?—almost constantly after I met you. You asked me to tell you the dream then, but I did not. I am going to tell it to you now. Some years ago, when I was in this quaint little city, I had had a fatiguing day of sight-seeing, exploring hurriedly every point of interest it was possible to crowd into one day; and on my return to the hotel, I remarked to a companion that I felt such unusual lassitude I feared that I had brought with me from Rome a touch of its pestilential fever. I could not eat, and I went to bed hoping that a good night's sleep would bring me around all right in the morning. Before I fell asleep, I was conscious that my waking thoughts were peculiarly confused. Strange fancies came to me and seemed half real. Long forgotten stanzas of poems flitted through my mind, always with some change in the words that rendered them absurd. An intense sense of loneliness and desolation came over me, and I longed with an unutterable longing for the cool touch of my mother's hands on my burning forehead. In this state of mind I fell asleep at last. In my dreams I was walking over bogs, now sinking up to my neck in them, and then extricated by terrible dragons, which flying over me, pulled me out by the hair of my head. Then I was pursued by demons, a precipice before me, over which I fell, bounding from rock to rock. But the most fearful vision was that, in which I imagined myself stretched upon the rack in the dungeons of Ratisbon. I even saw each

implement of torture that was to be used in turn. The torches were already lighted that were to be held under my arms ; when slowly floating down towards me, I saw a lovely form in soft draperies of grey—the same pictured Madonna, whose face had arrested me before it, in entranced admiration, that very day in the old palace of Zambecari. She unloosened the cords, she took my hand and led me up through dark vaulted passages, out into the fresh and balmy air ; nor did she leave me then. She guided my footsteps whither she would ; and I seemed to move beside her as if I had wings, through green dales sparkling with rivulets, lush with exuberant foliage, and over breezy uplands, until at last we reached the loveliest spot that ever an artist painted or a poet portrayed. It might have been fairy land, so enchantingly beautiful was the swelling ground which, wherever the eye looked, seemed so much more lovely than earth's fairest domains, that nothing out of Paradise I am sure could compare with it. Upon a bed of roses, spread for me underneath the thick boughs of glossy ilex trees, and bordered with acanthus plants, I stretched myself for the repose I needed, listening to the gurgle and splash of fountains, and the sweet strains of melody that seemed to float down from the clouds above me, where I saw cherubs and seraphs looking out upon us. My Madonna laid her bambino on the roseate couch beside me, and with her own hands gathered flowers—far more beautiful than any I had ever before seen—and brought them to me. Their fragrance seemed to intoxicate me, and I dared to seize and press passionately to my lips the hand that had ministered to me. Her sad eyes were filled with the reproaches that found no other utterance, as she slowly arose in the air and floated

away from me, farther and farther, until she disappeared beyond the soft, fleecy clouds from which angels had looked down upon us. But still the seraphic music filled the air, and still the little bambino frolicked among the flowers. Then I awoke, and found myself in the odd little chamber of the inn at Bologna, and a street organ playing beneath my window. When I first saw you, Agatha, I wondered whether it was a mere fancy, or whether you really resembled the Madonna of my dream. To-day I have again seen the picture, and it was almost like looking at your very self. Your eyes seemed to look out from the canvas at me, as did those of the vision when it spoke the words which I have not yet repeated to you ; for when the little one was left beside me, its mother said, "I have brought you my child to console you for all you have suffered." Agatha, you are my Madonna, and no Madonna ever possessed more entirely the heart of her worshipper than you possess mine. All things in life, that are not in some way blended or associated with you have lost all interest for me. I count the days, the very hours even, that must pass before we can meet ; and then, there is no power upon earth that can prevent me from using that influence over you, which I still feel confident I possess, to persuade you to be wholly mine.'

This was a portion of the last letter that Agatha received before they sailed. Hitherto, she had carefully abstained from making any allusions to their anticipated tour ; but now, she wrote in reply,

'We shall be upon the ocean at the same time, and I do not wish to hide from you the pleasure I feel in the thought that perhaps I may see the "Scotia," in which you write that you are to sail ; as we pass each

other, to stretch out my hand towards you, to send you in thought the kisses that my lips must never give. I have never before admitted that I love you, but I owe you this much, and no more. I do love you, Carroll, I loved you before I knew it—when that love acknowledged would have been guilt ; and the agony, the torture that it was to me to make this discovery, was only appeased, when I learned to look upon the feeling, that sprung up unbidden in my heart for you, as not sinful in itself—only in the improper indulgence of it. Let me be perfectly frank with you, keeping nothing back ; and then you will be better able to understand the resolution I have taken. In those days when my soul was being absorbed by yours, and I knew it not, my life became a dream of intense joy. The days passed on golden wings. The earth, the sky, the sea, all seemed as if a new world had disclosed itself to me. The windows of heaven, in short, were opened for me, and I knew the bliss that angels know ; for is not love their highest bliss ? I walked as one who had wings, and knew not the secret of the ineffable joy, the indefinable power that had come to me, awakening in me emotions which, until then, had lain dormant in my tardily developed nature. I asked for nothing more on earth, or in heaven. And yet, it never once entered my mind that this was love. Not until the hour in which we parted, did this revelation come to me ; and with it came such mental agony, as, were such things possible, would have turned the tears I wept to blood. On my knees I had often thanked God for sending me this holy consecrated friendship, to fill my heart as it had never before been filled. Now upon my knees, I begged Him to take me out of life and out of all remembrance of the unhallowed love that

had debased me in my own sight. Oh, how I longed in those days for annihilation! Day after day, I felt my strength growing less, and I rejoiced that it was so. I knew that, struggle as I might, I never could conquer the idolatrous love you had awakened. I did not attempt to conceal from myself the knowledge that your love was more precious to me than all else in life, but with this knowledge came such remorseful self-reproach, in that I felt this love for one who was the husband of another, as to threaten exhaustion of my vital forces, and the crushing out of my life all that made life desirable. At last, through the experience of a friend, I was brought to look upon my own experience in a healthier light, to realise that there is no sin in loving, only when it is indulged, to the encroaching upon the claims of others; in short, that by it and through it we might reach such heights of moral grandeur, as only those attain who have overcome "the world, the flesh and the evil one"—that Trinity which seems to take a firmer hold upon mortals than the Holy Trinity of our creed. And now I come to the result of all this turmoil of emotion, which so racked and tore my double nature that it came near sundering them, and setting free the higher. I have always had in my composition a spice of the Roman Catholic devotee—shown in my belief in purgatory, and my desire to do penance for my sins. It is the penance which I have prescribed for myself to undergo that which now remains to be told. For that brief delirium of joy in which I indulged, before I saw the precipice towards which my footsteps were tending, I must for ever debar myself the higher joy of being your wife. It does not seem to have occurred to you that I have looked upon you as free to love and to marry again

since Mildred's marriage ; but when you recall the only reason I had for not considering you divorced, you will also know why, and how it is, that by her marriage she has rendered you free to marry. But my resolution is fixed and unalterable, and although I now know you to be free, Carroll, I still say, I can never be your wife. This is the penance that I have decreed to myself, to atone for the humiliation, which in loving you I have undergone—it is the sacrifice which I make to appease my bruised and wounded self-respect. So only can I look into the eyes of others with the calm self-assurance of innocence.'

This was the substance of Agatha's letter. When she had finished, and despatched it to Carroll Tracey's New York address, there to await his return, she felt the heroism that inspires saints and martyrs to their deeds of sacrifice. But in the days that followed, this fervour almost died out ; and dejected beyond degree, with the depression that always follows exaltation, she sat on the deck of the ocean steamer as it left the harbour of New York, looking wistfully back to the shore where, in a few days, Carroll Tracey was to land.

PART III.

‘The old drama of passions and temptations is always
being repeated with new scenes.’

CHAPTER I.

THE travellers landed at Queenstown, and after visiting several points of interest, the lovely Lake of Killarney, the Giant's Causeway, and the wonderfully beautiful scenery in its vicinity, they crossed to Scotland ; lingering long about its weird lakes, its breezy downs and heathery slopes; then, after thoroughly enjoying England,—where picturesque scenery is combined with associations eminently interesting, from historical events, or from memories of departed authors and statesmen,—they found the autumn drawing so near its close that they were compelled to make all haste to reach Italy before the winter set in.

‘When once we are on the other side of the Alps,’ said Mr. Lee, briskly rubbing his hands in front of a blazing fire in their parlour at ‘*Hôtel des Quatres Saisons*,’ in Munich, ‘when once we are on the other side of the Alps, we shall find a more salubrious climate. We will not need fires in sunny Italy.’

In Aunt Hester’s and Agatha’s minds, arose visions of orange groves, flowers blooming in mid-winter in the open air, trees never leafless ; and over all, a sky of enamel, softly, yet intensely blue, white fleecy clouds, zephyrs laden with the perfumes of odorous blossoms, and vocal with the songs of birds.

It was in the first days of December that they

reached 'la bella Firenze,' rightly named for its exquisite beauty of situation ; but what disappointment for Agatha and her aunt, and to Mr. Lee even, who had never before been in Italy during the winter months, to find the trees already shorn of their verdure, traces of snow on the purple Apennines, and the piercing Tramontana sweeping down from them with its sharp icy breath ! The Arno, with which Agatha had most poetical associations, conjuring it up in fancy as a tranquil, limpid stream, flowing in stately beauty to the sea, its green banks glistening with marble villas and crowned with grey mediæval castles, she found instead, rushing headlong through the heart of the city, washing the foundations of block after block of structures, time-stained, and dingy as its own turbid waters.

Not until they had taken their first drive on the Cascine and to some neighbouring villas, back on the wooded heights, did they begin to realise how much of beauty Florence possesses—beauty, which even in mid-winter attracts strangers from all parts of the globe to make it their home ; and not until after the galleries of the Academy, the Uffizzi, and the Pitti, had beguiled away morning after morning of their stay, did they comprehend why it is that the 'forestieri,' once settled there, are so loth to leave.

Society too enforced its claims upon them ; for Mr. Lee, upon his arrival, had met an old college friend, who had for years been settled in Florence as a permanent resident ; and in the Diplomatic Corps, he found one of the foreign ministers to be a man known to him intimately in America, during the years in which he had there served his King in the same capacity. So the wide gates of American society flew open to receive them ; and the

narrower door of foreign society as readily admitted them, endorsed as they were by one of their own number. And, all three speaking French as fluently as they did, they saw life in the then capital of Italy under the most favourable circumstances.

Agatha welcomed the whirl that took her out of herself. Not a line had she received from Carroll Tracey since he had landed in America ; and not until his letters had ceased, did she know how far they had contributed towards making their separation endurable to her. She read of his arrival home in a New York journal, and this was all.

It was at a ball, given in the lavishly adorned apartments of an American millionaire, that Agatha one evening came suddenly upon Mildred and Frank Mortimer, of whose arrival in Florence she had not even heard. The surprise was mutual, but as Agatha looked into the changed face of her friend, she wondered what new sorrow was leaving its impress there. Her cousin too, Agatha found greatly changed. Not that his face bore the worn, weary look, that characterised Mildred's ; but there were restless glances of his eyes, and a scornful curl of his well-shaped lips that Agatha had never seen before. It was as if he looked out upon the world defiantly, as one who knows not at what moment he may be compelled to resent some rudeness. Mr. Lee, his sister, and Count Riploff, were standing near ; and conversation had turned upon Madame Garazzi, a well-known Italian beauty, who was seated within sight, wearing the coronet that by birth she had a right to wear ; although by her marriage not acquiring any. Her husband, if not belonging to a noble family, was one of those who possess that nobility which is of

far more value, namely, of soul and of culture. Madame Garazzi was as usual surrounded by gentlemen ; but one could not help remarking that no lady ever joined her.

‘Is it true,’ asked Aunt Hester, ‘that she has no friends among the Italian ladies?—that they do not hold any intercourse with her?—that one and all have waged war with her?’

‘One would be scarcely justified in saying that,’ replied Count Riploff. ‘In society people seldom quarrel openly ; but the women can never forgive Madame Garazzi for the book she wrote, full of local allusions that cut right and left.’

‘Ah, was it a book?’ inquired Mr. Lee. ‘I gave them credit for turning a cold shoulder for better reasons. I thought her intimacy with the King was the cause.’

Count Riploff gave a very slight but expressive shrug as he answered, ‘Then Florence would not be the paradise that it is for women whose lives have not been blameless. Is it possible that you are ignorant of the fact that every woman with a blighted name takes refuge here, and finds as much protection as did the culprits of old when they seized hold of the horns of the altar?’

Mildred heard every word, and Agatha saw her press one hand tightly over her heart, as with a flushed face, she cast a nervous glance at her husband. He, however, was engrossed by a Miss Watkins, a pretty American, who, besides her charming face and figure and well-bred air, was said to have several hundred-thousand attractions; or would, in time, inherit them. Near by, in a corner, were three or four dowagers, who, assisted by Mr. Clawson, were canvassing the rumours connected with Mildred’s divorce ; for Mr. Clawson, with the Athertons and Mr.

Jenkins, made a part of the American colony at Florence.

‘They say in New York that man who sings so well, who was always with her, was the cause of the divorce,’ said one of the ladies. ‘You know the one whom I mean ; he is notorious for talking about his affairs. Mrs. Tracey sings too,—Mrs. Mortimer, I should say. One can’t be expected to remember names when people are divorced one month, and married the next.’

‘I daresay you mean Paul Howard,’ answered Mr. Clawson.

‘The very one. They say he has followed her to Europe too.’

‘Which is not very probable, as he and Mr. Mortimer are lawyers, associated together, and could not leave at the same time. But you are quite sure, Mrs. Dedham, that he was the cause of the divorce ?’

‘Oh yes, I am certain of that, I heard all the particulars.’

‘I am glad I was able to recall the name to your memory. I wanted to fix upon the man, because, happening to know the true story, I wished to learn how far people could go astray. In this instance, rumour is nearer right than usual.’

‘There, didn’t I tell you so ?’ exclaimed Mrs. Dedham triumphantly. ‘Mrs. Jordan declared there had been no scandal.’

‘Mrs. Jordan was right,’ continued Mr. Clawson. ‘And yet Howard was the cause of the divorce ; for he showed Mrs. Tracey some impertinence which led both husband and wife to agree to a separation. Not on account of any imprudence on her part however ; but simply because it brought about a *dénouement*, after

long years of endurance of all those evils, small and great, that necessarily arise in the married state, when persons, not suited to each other in tastes and temperaments, have rashly entered into it. That the lawyer employed by Mr. Tracey wound up the case by marrying the fair *divorcée* ought to afford sufficient proof that there was no guilt on her part. I do not know Mrs. Mortimer ; but I am going to have myself presented, and see what kind of a woman she is.'

Mrs. Dedham assuming a severely virtuous expression answered, 'I should think her marrying again within a few months after her divorce was obtained, shows *what kind* of a woman she is. I hope you will not introduce her to me.'

'That would be a liberty I should never think of taking,' he replied.

Crossing the room, Mr. Clawson joined a more attractive group, in an opposite corner ; Colonel Potten and Miss Lennox being of the group.

'How did you manage to escape?' asked a pretty young blonde, making a place on the sofa beside her. 'Now reward me, for this seat, by telling me the last good thing that "the duchess" has got off. No hope of her ever equalling the "distantly but certainly" story, I fear.'

'Yes, I have something better than that to tell you. You saw how I was waylaid, and how resignedly I submitted myself to the exigency. I was rewarded. "The duchess" informed me that her ball is to come off on the thirtieth, and asked me to keep myself disengaged. I replied that I should be sure to do so, as I well knew I would meet "all the world" in her *salons*. She smiled graciously, and with a deprecatory wave of her

hand said, "Oh no, not quite *all* the world, perhaps ; but *demi-monde*, *demi-monde* ; of that you may be sure."

'What did the woman mean ?' asked the blonde, turning to Miss Lennox, the colour increasing in her cheeks ; for she was one whose bloom had not been brushed off as yet by her contact with those in society who delight in experimenting as to how broadly they may talk.'

'That half the world would be there ! it is an excellent illustration of her French ; which will be the death of me yet,' answered Miss Lennox ; 'but what was the other story, May ?'—the "distantly but certainly."

'Mr. Clawson will tell you. I heard it from him.'

'I won't vouch for the truth of it,' said Mr. Clawson, 'but, as the story goes, Hawkins, who had heard that Mrs. Dedham claimed connection with the Bourbon family, asked her if she was related, and she answered, "Distantly but certainly."

'That accounts for her speaking French so well,' said Miss Lennox laughing. 'I never hear her attempts without remembering what a humorous friend of mine said in reference to the irregular verbs—that he had heard they gave a great deal of trouble, but that he never permitted them to trouble him, for he regulated them all to suit himself. Why, there is Mildred Tracey ! well, I do believe everyone I know has come to Europe. Mr. Clawson, would you object to taking me across the room to speak with her ?'

'Delighted,' said Mr. Clawson, offering his arm. 'Will you present me to her, but do not call her Mrs. Tracey. You know she is married to Frank Mortimer.'

Miss Lennox had but a few moments' conversation with Mrs. Mortimer before Mr. Clawson found an opportunity to appropriate her ; and leaving Miss Lennox with Agatha and her friends, he made a promenade with the beautiful woman, delighting in the consciousness that he was attracting general observation, and that Mrs. Dedham was inwardly fuming over his having extended his protection to one whom she had already resolved to put down, so far as her influence could avail in doing so.

‘Don’t you think Mildred awfully changed?’ asked Miss Lennox of Agatha.

‘Yes, she is changed ; but how lovely she looks ! I have been trying to make out what it is, for without losing any of her beauty she looks far more delicate and ethereal.’

‘It is her expression that has changed ; she has more thought—more——’

‘Ah, but an expression I do not like to see on her face,’ interrupted Agatha. ‘It has suffering in it; still, whatever it is, it has so elevated and spiritualised her beauty that it is heightened not lessened by it.’

‘She has come to the right place to soothe her sufferings ; “Misery loves company,” you know ; and she will find many here whose disregard of the laws of *les convenances* has more than equalled her own. Your cousin, too, will find no end of opportunities to keep his hand in, which was the excuse that he once made to me for his endless flirtations.’

Agatha remembered when and where he had made use of the same expression to her. She answered,

‘I trust that his flirtations have come to an end now that he is a married man. No man who cares to keep his wife’s affection would flirt ; or, if he did, he must

give his wife equal privileges, and Frank is too jealous to do that, I am sure.'

'As for his flirtations having come to an end, you can see for yourself how basely you wrong him if you glance in that boudoir, where he has enticed Miss Watkins, evidently doing his best to convince her that he is another victim to her charms.'

Agatha glanced in that direction, and saw enough to cause her to think she had divined the source of Mildred's suffering. 'Her Oswald is true to his prototype,' she thought.

Meantime Mr. Clawson and Mrs. Mortimer, having made a tour of the rooms, were seated on a divan in a wide corridor, where a constant stream of people were passing.

'Shall I have the pleasure of meeting you to-morrow evening, at Count Centori's ball?' he asked.

'We do not know him; we have only just come to Florence,' she answered.

'That is he, standing in the opposite door. If you will allow me, I will present him to you.'

'Not unless he asks to be presented.'

'But he has been asking as plainly as eyes can for the last quarter of an hour. The moment that I leave you, I am sure he will join me, and ask to be introduced to you.'

Mr. Clawson made a scarcely noticeable signal, and Count Centori crossed and was presented.

Later in the evening, when Miss Watkins was claimed by her partner for the *cotillon*, Mr. Mortimer bethought himself of looking after his wife; and finding her seated between two men, neither of whom were known to him, he made inquiries, which resulted in his

hearing that Mr. Clawson was an American, best known for his fondness for notoriety ; and that Count Centori was the greatest *roué* in Florence. Both men had themselves presented when he joined his wife ; but his manner was such that they soon left him in undisputed possession, at liberty to take her to her carriage which he had announced was in waiting.

CHAPTER II.

THE next day, when Mildred and her husband came in from their drive in the Cascine, they found Count Centori's cards, and an invitation to his ball.

‘How thoughtful of the Count, and how kind! for you know you should have called first, after the introduction. It is the custom of the country.’

‘I would have seen him in Tophet before I would have called,’ he answered. ‘I am not going to run after any counts, nor have any counts running after you.’

Mildred’s eyes flashed, but quickly recovering her temper, she said,

‘How unreasonable you are! Can you not accept a civility in the same spirit in which it is offered?’

‘Not from a jackanapes of an Italian, who thinks, because he has a title, that he does me an honour by making love to my wife.’

‘Frank, how insulting you are!’

He made no answer, but, drawing off his gloves, twisted his blonde moustache into shape, as he stood in front of a mirror.

Mildred approached him, laying one hand upon his shoulder. ‘I thought you would be very much pleased to get this invitation, which enables you, if you avail yourself of it, to see something of foreign society without

such a large mixture of the American element as one finds in American houses. Why then do you make it the occasion of cruelty to me? for indeed it is cruel to show such distrust of me.'

Frank Mortimer slightly moved the shoulder on which rested the lovely hand—so lovely that a sculptor had the previous evening begged permission to model it; but slight as was the movement, it was sufficient to cause Mildred to withdraw it.

'What is the matter with you, Frank? It seems to me that I cannot please you, try as I may. I did not care for this invitation for myself, for I am not strong enough to go to balls, I find. I wish you would tell me if I have displeased you in any way; but don't be so moody. You have scarcely spoken to me during our drive, and now you are absolutely unkind. What is the matter?'

'I will not have your name associated with Count Centori. We will go to the ball; but if he comes here you are never to receive him, and if he joins you on the Cascine you are to answer in monosyllables.'

'I prefer not to accept any courtesy from him if I am to be uncourteous in return,' she answered coldly. 'Surely, a man whom your cousin Agatha receives it is proper for me to receive.'

'If you do not know that what Agatha can do with impunity you cannot do, you will find it out sooner or later. I told you last night that this Count Centori has the reputation of being the most unprincipled libertine in Florence, and that is saying a great deal in a place where all men are supposed to be libertines. I can assure you it was anything but agreeable for me to find you seated between such a man and another scarcely

less objectionable, for Clawson is one of those humbugs who, under the pretence of upholding a woman, helps to damn her, by publishing his own version of her wrongs and the magnanimity he has shown in defending her. He is a gas-pipe—a bag of wind ! I detest such men.'

' You are very unreasonable, and very unjust, I think. If I have put myself in a situation to need defence, as I most certainly have, you should not blame Mr. Clawson for defending me, if indeed he has, which from a remark that he dropped accidentally I think he may have done. He was at college with Mr. Tracey, and possibly he has heard through him the particulars which neither you nor I need blush to have made known.'

' It was the height of bad breeding, if not of impertinence, in the man to have alluded to the past in any way, or to having made any defence of you. I do not wish to know any more of him ; and more than this, I wish you to cut him dead the very next time you meet him.'

' That I cannot do,' answered Mildred with dignity. ' I will stay at home most willingly—bury myself if you desire it ; but I will never be rude to anyone who has shown me nothing but kindness.'

A bright spot glowed on either cheek, and her eyes held in them all the resolution of her tone and manner.

' There is a wise old adage that I often have occasion for remembering,' said Frank Mortimer. '" Marry in haste, and repent at leisure." ' As he spoke, he glanced at Mildred from the corners of his eyes, in the smouldering fire of which a very devil seemed lurking.

Every vestige of colour fled from her face—even her lips became ashy pale. For a moment she covered her

eyes with one hand, then, withdrawing it, she met his glance, as she said,

‘Frank, I have often been made to feel that you regretted our marriage—that my love did not repay you for the annoyances that it has brought upon you; but I never expected to hear you *say* that it is so. I am glad that you have said it, for it gives me courage to tell you that which I was too cowardly to tell you before that which I have kept from you because of my wish to save you from one unnecessary pang.’

She hesitated; and he, with the same lurking spirit of evil in his eyes, asked her, sneeringly,

‘What have you kept from me? Have you already arranged a rendezvous with this Count?’

Before he could finish his sentence, Mildred, springing to her feet, confronted him, her eyes aflame with angry light.

‘There is a point beyond which forbearance ceases to be a virtue,’ she said.

‘And which point, having reached, I suppose you will now cease to be virtuous,’ he answered, with an insolent smile at his coarse jest.

She held her hands over her ears as if to shut out his words; the colour came and went; her eyes had in them the look of some poor hunted thing that, turning upon its pursuers, beseeches mutely for mercy. Still the sneer lingered on Frank Mortimer’s lips, and the smouldering blaze glowered in his eyes.

Then dropping on her knees beside him, she said, seizing his hand,

‘For pity’s sake, Frank, tell me that you did not mean what you said; tell me that you were angry

with me, and that you did not know what you were saying.'

He drew his hand away. 'I will dine at the club to-day. I have no fondness for scenes,' he answered ; and, taking his hat, left the apartment.

When the door had closed, Mildred arose, walked to the pier-glass, and, lookingly steadily at the white reflection of herself, all the time pressing both hands tightly over her heart, she said, 'in a tone that would have been theatrical but for the intense feeling that was in her voice,

'How much longer? I wonder, how much longer? Oh, what a wretched mistake my whole life has been !'

Then, as a few lines of Mrs. Browning's poetry came to her mind, she repeated them aloud,

And is it wisely done

If we, who cannot gaze above, should walk the earth alone?
If we, whose virtue is so weak, should have a will so strong,
And stand blind on the rocks to choose the right path from the wrong ?

She did not hear the low tap on the closed door, neither was she aroused by the opening of it that quickly followed.

Agatha entered alone, but stood transfixed as she saw Mildred standing before the glass, apparently talking to the reflection of herself. Her first movement to approach her attracted Mildred's attention, who, turning, threw herself into Agatha's arms, and, closely held there, wept like a tired child in her embrace.

'Mildred, how dreadfully your heart beats !'

'This is nothing ; it is much worse than this at times.'

'But it *is* something, Mildred. You must see a physician at once. Let me send for one this moment.'

Mildred shook her head. 'I will tell you what I have told no one. I have seen a physician about it—two physicians—one of them the most eminent in London for heart disease, whom my own doctor at home advised me to consult. They agree in their opinion that nothing can be done for me. I may live for years, and I may die at any moment. I have not had the courage to tell my husband.'

'Say rather that you have had the heroism to keep the knowledge from him ; but he *must* know it, that he may guard you from all excitement. I know how bad excitements are for any heart trouble. You must not think of going to any more balls. We will let Frank go by himself, and I will stay with you, for they bore me more and more. We will have such pleasant evenings together.'

Agatha was not one to be denied when once she had determined what she would do, and she persisted in carrying out her intentions. She it was who warned Frank of the perilous nature of the disease which sooner or later must terminate Mildred's life. At first he was thoroughly alarmed, and hastened to assure his wife that he had not spoken in earnest the wounding words that had rankled since in her heart like arrows turning in their wounds ; but as the days glided by into weeks, and he saw no marked change, Mildred seeming to grow stronger, his fears became quieted, and he again entered into the gaiety, which for a time he had deprived himself of.

For the greater convenience of Agatha, Mr. Lee removed his family to the hotel where his nephew had taken 'an apartment.' While he did not entirely approve of Agatha's immuring herself as she was now doing, he did not offer serious opposition to her

course. But he made it a point that she should accompany her aunt and himself to the royal ball, and urged Mildred to accompany them. When the day came round, Agatha, finding that Mildred had no thoughts of going, refused to leave her; and after the others had left, went to her room to stay with her, as she never retired until her husband's return, no matter how late he might remain.

'What shall I read to you to-night?' asked Agatha, picking up a little volume of poetry that lay near her on the table.

'I feel more in the mood for talking to-night. "Roba di Roma" has filled my mind with thoughts of Rome; and if I could borrow a pair of wings I would fly there. Frank said he would go when this ball was over, but now he wishes to wait for a dinner that will not come off for a week.'

'Why will you not go with us, and let him follow at his leisure?' asked Agatha. 'I cannot tell you how sad it makes me to think of leaving you here. That is why I would not go to the ball to-night, because we are so soon to be separated.'

'I was sure that you stayed at home on my account, although you would not admit it before. You are too good to me, Agatha.'

'No, I did not stay at home on your account, but for my own pleasure, which I was selfish enough to prefer to that of my father and aunt. I stayed at home because you were not able to go, and because I would not have had one moment's happiness without you. So, you see, it was pure selfishness.'

'Never call yourself selfish. You are the most unselfish person I have ever known. Think how you used

to sit and write by the hour for Carroll when he was making that translation at Newport. I am sure I would not have done as much for him, although he was then my husband.'

Agatha's face grew scarlet. Mildred continued,

'I have been thinking a great deal of him lately—of the fearful wrong I committed in marrying him as I did ; and I have wished so much to talk to you about him, and to leave a message with you for him in case I should not live to return, as I sometimes fancy I never will. Would you deliver it to him, Agatha ?'

'Certainly I would ; but do not let us get the blues to-night, as we shall if we talk over such matters.'

'There is no time like the present. I shall feel happier to know that he will be sure to hear some day how kindly I feel towards him, and how much I have wished that I could in some way atone for all the unhappiness I have brought him. Agatha, is it not terrible to think what life-long misery is sometimes the result of one mad act ? Do you think everything in this world is just as God intended it should be ?'

'Do not ask me, Mildred, dear. All my life it has perplexed me to discover where free will ends and fate begins. Some one has said that life is a school, and sin and sorrow are its teachers. I have not a doubt that all will be made clear to us in the future, but now life is a greater mystery to me than death.'

'So it is to me,' answered Mildred. 'I am not afraid to die, but I am afraid to live. Agatha, I made my second fatal mistake when I married your cousin. No woman situated as I was should marry a second time ; and still worse, I was so weak as to be persuaded into marrying too soon. It is a terrible thing for a man to marry a woman

who is talked about as people must talk of me—a terrible thing for a sensitive man to feel that half the world are pitying him for being taken in, and the other half despising him for it.'

'Pray do not talk so, Mildred. I had no idea that this is what is preying upon you. Whoever knows anything about your divorce and it is a very, very small part of the world that does know—knows also that your present husband was Mr. Tracey's lawyer, and his having married you proves your innocence of any such charges as those that you fancy. Now do not let such thoughts possess your mind for one moment even. Poor Mildred!' and rising and bending over her, she kissed her forehead. 'Who could ever have conceived the idea that you were worrying over such fancies? Of course, Frank has never suspected it, or he would soon have set your mind at rest for ever, by telling you that he cares very little for what men say, knowing you for the dear, true, loving wife that you are to him.' Agatha remained standing by the lounge where Mildred was reclining.

'You are right. I have never spoken to Frank on this subject; but I will be perfectly candid with you. If I had not seen how keenly Frank feels every look and comment, I might never have realised as I do now what a curse my love has been to him. But this is not what I wished to talk to you about. Draw your chair nearer, and sit down by me, Agatha.'

Agatha did as she was bidden. Still holding the volume of poetry in one hand, and placing the other on Mildred's head, she said, 'I see that you are exciting yourself, and I cannot let you talk any more on these subjects. I will read you this little poem which I opened at

by chance, and which was written by one who, like ourselves, has been perplexed by life's problems, but who has learned that it is good to trust to God to lead us when we have lost our way, as both you and I have, dear Mildred, at times.'

So Agatha read the poem, and then, seeing tears forcing their way through Mildred's closed eyelids, she said,

' You are too weak to-night ; I must not even read to you. I am going to leave you, that you may sleep and get composed before Frank returns.'

Mildred did not object ; but as Agatha stooped over her to kiss her, she held her fast, and whispered,

' Tell Carroll that, as long as I lived, I prayed God to make him as happy as he would have been if he had never met me ; and that I feel the assurance my prayer will be granted.'

Agatha slipped down upon her knees by the side of Mildred's couch, and, passing her hand over her forehead soothingly, said,

' Mildred, have you never thought that his life may be all the happier in the end through his having known you ? It is good to trust, you know, when we cannot see the way—good to trust the hand that leads us, Mildred. Do not forget that. Our Heavenly Father draws all His children home at last, no matter how far they have wandered away from Him, and perhaps, in another life, if not in this, Carroll Tracey will be happier than he ever could have been had it not been for the discipline he has had here, through your lives having been blended together for a time. The hard kernels of experience that we plant in this world must bear rich fruits somewhere ; if not in time, in eternity.'

‘Yes, it must be so. I have never lost my faith in God’s goodness, nor in His mercy. I know He will make all that is dark to us here clear as the noonday there—all that conflicts with our ideas of Him, straight and plain. Yes, He leads us all home at last. That thought has been in my mind so constantly lately. Kiss me once more, Agatha, dear Agatha; good night.’

Again and again Agatha kissed her; feeling such a reluctance to leave her alone, that after she had closed the door she opened it, but seeing Mildred lying with closed eyes, shut it softly, and went to her chamber.

The next morning, soon after daybreak, Agatha was awakened by a rap on her door, which, before she had time to answer, was quickly followed by another and another. As soon as she could wrap her dressing-gown around her, and put her feet into her slippers, she opened the door, the knocks continuing with little intermission. Her cousin stood there, just as he had returned from the ball—even his gloves still on; but no living face was ever of a ghastlier hue than his.

‘For God’s sake, come and see what is the matter with Mildred! She is lying like one dead, and I cannot arouse her.’

Agatha, seized with a cold shudder, and trembling in every limb, followed him.

Mildred lay on the lounge, just as Agatha had left her—too beautiful for death. She seemed as if in a sweet sleep, so heavenly was the smile her marble-white face wore upon its lips.

‘Surely, she is sleeping!’ exclaimed Agatha. ‘So tranquilly, too; do not let us disturb her.’

Still Agatha's teeth were chattering from the fear that it was the sleep of death. She kissed her on the lips. Their icy coldness sent a chill to her heart.

'Kiss me once more Agatha, dear Agatha; good night,' were the last words that would ever fall from them upon mortal ears.

CHAPTER III.

AGATHA had been several weeks in Rome, before she had sufficiently recovered from the shock of Mildred's sudden death to think of writing the message to Carroll Tracey which she had promised to deliver. Then she began to feel that she was neglecting a sacred duty, and yet, as often as she sat down to the task, as often did she arise without commencing it. How could she write to him again, as long as her last letter remained unanswered?

One morning, when their letters were brought in from the banker's, Agatha received one with the well-known hand writing. The joy of seeing it again sent the blood through her veins as if propelled by the strokes of a sledge-hammer. She held it a long time without breaking the seal, fancying all there might be within it, for it never occurred to her that it could be other than one of those closely filled epistles he had been in the habit of writing. At last, she broke the seal, and, opening it, saw within only one of Mrs. Browning's sonnets, copied :

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand
Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life, I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand

Serenely in the sunshine as before,
Without the sense of that which I forbore—
Thy touch upon the palm. The widest land
Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine
With pulses that beat double. What I do
And what I dream include thee, as the wine
Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue
God for myself, He hears that name of thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears of two.

Certainly an hour had passed, and still Agatha sat as if stupefied, holding the letter in her hand, and reading the sonnet over and over as if she had not yet caught its meaning.

‘That letter does not seem so long that it need to engross you so, Agatha,’ her aunt said at last.

‘I am astounded by the coincidence,’ she answered, folding it, and putting it out of sight. ‘Do you remember, Aunt Hester, telling me how you received letters containing only quotations? It is the strangest thing that ever happened, but I have received just such a one. Did you ever know anything so remarkable?’

‘Human nature is the same in all its generations. The histories of love repeat themselves as do the histories of the nations,’ replied her aunt.

That same morning Agatha’s letter containing Mildred’s message was written and despatched, but no allusion made to the sonnet; and then she began to count the days that must elapse before the answer could reach her. Rome seemed to her the saddest place on earth to dwell in; but it was not alone the haunting, solemn memories of its majestic past that cast such sombre shadows over the city. It was the freshness of the loss she had sustained, and the irrepressible longing for love and sympathy that filled her soul—a love that she had but to reach out her hand to receive in its fullest and richest measure, and which in still denying herself she was doing

violence not only to her own heart but to the heart of another. Rome seen in such hours could not fail to be both desolate and dreary. Its bluest sky, its brightest sunshine, could not lift from her heart the weight that oppressed it. Go where she would, from the endless galleries of the treasure-stored Vatican to those of the Capitol, and the numerous palace collections—from one magnificent ruin to another—from the lovely Pincian with its inspiring view to the broad Campagna, where the Sabine and Alban mountains seemed melting into gold and purple mists—go where she would, there was no beauty of nature so exquisite, no works of art so pleasing or so grand, that Agatha could enjoy as she would have done had not thoughts of Mildred and of one other haunted her like ghosts that refuse to be exorcised.

As they were driving along the *Via Appia Vecchia* one afternoon, after having visited the catacombs of St. Calixtus, Agatha said, 'I remember once, as a school girl, having been terribly perplexed by a subject given me for a composition—"Dead Cities." Had I ever visited Rome I would have known what to have written. As it was, I took Herculaneum and Pompeii, and gave the reins to my imagination.'

'St. Calixtus is literally a city of the dead,' remarked Aunt Hester, 'and a city that I should never care to visit again. I felt all the time we were exploring one after another of its narrow streets, turning down passages to the right and to the left, intersected as they are by cross passages in every direction, that nothing would ever tempt me to risk my life in another catacomb. That the guide could find his way out of it does not seem half so wonderful to me as that the crumbling old arches did not fall down and bury us all alive.'

‘I never thought of fear,’ said Agatha.

‘Well, I must confess to having experienced something of the same terror that your aunt felt,’ said Mr. Lee. ‘One catacomb is quite enough for me. We will dispense with the others. I am afraid, had I lived in the times of the early Christians, I would have remained a pagan if for no other reason than on account of the superiority of their tombs. Only look at the fragments of sculpture that strew the ground on either side, and then erect in your imagination the elegant structures that these tombs which once lined the Via Appia must have been! Those that we visited yesterday, on the Via Latina too, with their exquisite bas-reliefs in the interior of classical and mythological subjects, and their gems of paintings, charming female figures, fruits and flowers, what cheerful and lovely abodes for the ashes of the dead. Yes! I would have been a pagan most assuredly.’

‘It is not all of life to live, nor all of death to die, and be buried,’ said Aunt Hester sententiously.

‘We know very little of the beyond,’ said Mr. Lee.

‘Enough to know that it matters not where the body is laid, after the spirit has flown,’ answered Aunt Hester. ‘Such a reproof as we have before us, for those who built such grand mausoleums for their worthless clay; their very ashes blown to the four winds of heaven.’

At this moment a carriage whirled past them; its occupant, a man, touching his hat as the horses dashed onwards.

‘Who was that?’ said Mr. Lee.

‘Some one who bears a remarkable resemblance to Ormus Davenport,’ answered Agatha.

‘Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you that I saw in one

of the English journals that he has just come into possession of some property in England, and that estates in another county with the baronetcy will fall to him, in event of the death of the present owner; so Davenport may yet be Sir Ormus.'

'Ah, that is what has brought him over then, I dare-say; and it must have been he. But why did he not stop to speak to us, I wonder?'

'I thought the horses seemed to be rather unmanageable,' said Aunt Hester.

On, over the old, black, square paving stones, they slowly pursued their way, along the narrow, straight road, past the noble tomb of Cecilia Metella, and the nameless one far beyond, on whose summit olive trees and grape vines thrive, and peasants' smiling faces look down from their cottage door, reaching at last the tower of basalt which Rome's barbarian invaders reared for purposes of defence upon the massive foundations of a tomb. Here they paused to enjoy the grand panorama that was spread out before them as far as the eye could reach. Between them and the Eternal City, once the world's proud capital, lay the Campagna's broad breast, scarred with the ruins that the ages had left upon it, while midway, the broken arches of the Claudian and Marcian aqueducts spanned it like girdles, rent here and there by the struggles of the conqueror, Time. Green vines clambered everywhere over grey ruins, and did their best to cover their ugly gaps and fissures. Frascati and Albano gleamed and flashed from the hillsides, and high above them Rocca di Papa frowned down in solitary grandeur.

As they were slowly walking, followed by their carriage, their attention was attracted by cries in the

distance, and the unusual sight of a commotion among the labourers on the road just where it turns, and is lost to sight in the close vicinity of the railway. A train had whizzed past, and now, as the smoke and dust scattered, they saw two horses madly plunging across the Campagna. Mr. Lee hurried his sister and Agatha into their carriage, and driving rapidly onwards they soon came to the scene of the accident. They found the former occupant of the carriage seated upon a fragment of a tomb, assiduously nursing his right ankle, which seemed to be giving him no little pain.

‘Zounds, Davenport ! Is that you ? If you had not been in such a confounded hurry to get past us, you would not have come to grief in this way,’ said Mr. Lee, who had alighted, and was approaching him. They shook hands, and Mr. Davenport made an ineffectual attempt to hobble up to the carriage, to speak to the ladies, but was glad to sit down again ; whereupon Aunt Hester and Agatha descended, and went to him. They insisted upon his making use of their carriage to return, and Mr. Lee, with the aid of Mr. Davenport’s servant and his own, succeeded in helping him into it, where, with his foot raised upon the opposite seat, he soon found himself suffering less pain. They stopped at the peasant’s cottage, and with a supply of handkerchiefs as bandages, and compresses wrung out from cold water, he was still further relieved, and they reached their hotel with much more comfort to Mr. Davenport’s sprained ankle than they could have anticipated. Mr. Lee insisted upon taking him to the hotel where he was stopping, that he might see he was well cared for ; and later in the evening, when the coachman returned with the captured horses, accompanied by Mr. Davenport’s

servant, who had been left behind, the latter made the necessary transfer of the luggage. And now Mr. Davenport, being made much of in his helpless condition, rather enjoyed his sprain, which proved of a less serious nature than the physician at first thought. Agatha often read to him, to help while the hours away, as he lay upon the lounge, which was daily wheeled (himself upon it) from his sitting-room into their own. He was one of the family now, to all seeming intents and purposes. He breakfasted, he lunched, and he dined with them ; and as soon as his sprain allowed him to walk up and down the stairs he invariably accompanied them in their afternoon drives. It was with unmixed feelings of satisfaction that he found Mr. Lee consulting him in all his plans of travel, and more than once Agatha referred to him as though it were a settled thing that he should go with them to Naples. But when they had reached that city, and the days of their stay flitted by into weeks, and all his penetration failed to detect any warmer feeling in Agatha than friendship, he began to be less sanguine in his hopes than during the time when they had been thrown so constantly together ; while her sympathy for his sufferings had made her voice more tender in its tones than she was aware, and her eyes share the tenderness. He never alarmed Agatha by any intimation of his hopes that her friendship would ripen into love. On the contrary, he treated her in such a matter-of-fact brotherly way as to completely throw her off her guard. For the first time in her life she had a friend whom she was able to treat with a sisterly familiarity, and she found it very charming to have so devoted a brother. Mr. Lee and Aunt Hester already began to talk between themselves of the possibilities and probabilities, but

were careful never to make any allusions before Agatha that might have the effect of changing her demeanour towards Mr. Davenport. The little world of Americans, in which were drifting rumours of Miss Lee's engagement to a titled Englishman, looked complacently upon their apparent devotion :—those who did not know Mr. Davenport, declaring him to be an English earl, whom she was going to marry ; and those who did know him, hazarding the conjecture that Davenport bade fair to cut the duke out, for sometimes it was one title and sometimes the other that was bestowed upon the supposed *fiancé*.

One day, when they had made the ascent of Vesuvius as far as the Hermitage, Mr. Lee and his sister were enjoying the superb view before them of the Bay of Naples, blue as the heavens ; the islands of Capri, Ischia, and Procida, steeped in golden light, or softly shaded with purple tints by the fleecy clouds that were sailing over them, the wavy outline of coast uniting every element of beauty that the imagination can conceive ; stretching from Sorrento to Cape Misenum in a crescent, glittering with white towns, and dotted with scattered villas. While they lingered long on the terrace to enjoy this magnificent panorama, Agatha and Mr. Davenport found seats within, in an open window, that looked towards Vesuvius. For days the volcano had been in an unusual state of activity, but on account of the black clouds that shrouded the summit from sight but little could be seen of its terrors and sublimities. A breeze that had sprung up had swept away every vestige of a cloud from its vicinity—the veil had been rent from the Shekinah, and its awful mysteries were disclosed to their eyes.

As Agatha looked, it seemed to her like some gigantic

sacrificial altar, from which the smoke of the incense was ascending to heaven. Now the soft white masses were whirled one side by the enormous puffs of thick black smoke that mounted straight to the skies, and now great flame-coloured torrents of gaseous vapours leapt from the crater and blended with and were lost in the dark ascending volumes. Between them and the cone sluggish streams of lava crept towards them, so slowly that the motion was scarcely conceivable ; and although the molten mass glowed through the hot cinders like liquid fire, the upper crust was as grey as the smouldering ashes of a furnace.

Agatha, fascinated by the weird sight, sat speechless, motionless, her head resting against one side of the casement.

Mr. Davenport's gaze was more restless, dwelling longer upon Agatha's face than upon the smoking mountain. At last he said,

' Do you remember a fragment of fresco, hanging on the wall of one of the corridors in the Uffizzi gallery at Florence—near the hall of Niobe—a woman, partially reclining, with her eyes cast upwards ? '

' With a Cupid aiming his dart at her ? Certainly, I remember it ; but how came you to think of that fresco at such a moment as this ? '

' For the very good reason that you remind me of it. In fact, I thought of you when I first saw it.'

' What a very common face I must have. I am always reminding some one either of pictures or of people.'

' A very picture-like face, certainly ; but by no means a common one. On the contrary, a very uncommon one. At the end of the same gallery there was a statue

—a woman seated in a chair, with the queenliest pose of head I ever saw in marble. I always thought of you when I passed that head, although the features were not yours ; they were more like Mrs. Tracey's—the *ci-devant* Mrs. Tracey. Poor creature, I heard of her death at Florence. Sad, was it not ?'

A long deep quivering sigh was Agatha's only answer.

Mr. Davenport, not knowing of her strong affection for her friend, nor of the circumstances attending the death of Mrs. Mortimer, noted the sigh, and treasured it in his remembrance as the first token of encouragement that he had received.

Just then the noise of a party dismounting reached them, and almost immediately people chatting and laughing, in tones familiar to Agatha and Mr. Davenport, entered. There were seven in all—Mr. and Mrs. Atherton, Mrs. Arthur Grey, Miss Lennox, Mr. Clawson, Colonel Potten and Mr. Jenkins. Mrs. Grey wore widow's weeds, but seemed withal to be in a very jolly mood.

Significant glances were exchanged between some members of the party (on the sly, of course) as Agatha and Mr. Davenport were discovered in the window seat. It was a very merry company that took luncheon together that day in the Hermitage ; for at the request of Mr. and Mrs. Atherton, Mr. Lee's party joined their own, the servants of each having brought with them hampers filled with viands, and wines that would have tempted the appetites of those less hungry than invariably are the toilers up Vesuvius.

When they came to take their chairs at the table, Mr. Jenkins said, 'Miss Lee, you ought to be seated between Colonel Potten and myself ; and Mrs. Atherton

must be on the other side of me. That was the arrangement at the last dinner-party we were at together. Now, I ask you, is it not remarkable that six of us who were at that dinner should take our luncheon together on Vesuvius ?'

'No more remarkable than things that are constantly happening,' answered Agatha. 'I often say that real life has far more in the way of singular coincidences and romance than any novel of the present school.'

She took the seat assigned to her by Mrs. Atherton, which brought her where Mr. Jenkins had proposed she should sit ; and as Mr. Davenport was at the other end of the table, Mr. Jenkins found an opportunity, before the luncheon was ended, to quiz her a little about him.

'I am divided in opinion as to which of your suitors is the lucky man,' he said. 'Rumour says that you have forgotten all the grievances that we have received at the hands of England during our late war, and are going to confer upon one of her sons the prize for which so many of our own countrymen have sued in vain ; but if appearances are not very deceitful, I should say you had thought better of the rash act.'

'Appearances *are* very deceitful,' replied Agatha ; 'and rumour almost invariably in the wrong. I long since made up my mind that I would remain a spinster.'

'Just what others have done before you, who in the end used their woman's privilege of changing their minds,' said Mr. Jenkins.

'You will find that I am not like other women, for I shall never marry,' persisted Agatha.

'I have heard that same assertion from lips that it was also my privilege to hear pronounce audibly the

marriage vow before a twelvemonth had rolled around. With your permission, I will record it for future reference,' and Mr. Jenkins drew out his note-book, and wrote under that day's date "Miss Agatha Lee has decided that she will never marry."

'What are you writing in your note-book?' said Miss Lennox from across the table.

'I am writing down Miss Agatha Lee's solemn assurance that she will never marry; in order that I may have the pleasure of showing it to her husband some day.'

'I think Mr. Jenkins will not have to go far, nor wait long,' she said *sotto voce* to Colonel Potten, who smiled rather grimly in reply.

The next steamer to the United States took out letters from various members of the Atherton party, confirming the rumours that had already crossed that Agatha Lee would soon be married to Ormus Davenport, who, it was said, had inherited a title with his English property; and this report reaching the ears of Carroll Tracey, he sat down and wrote a few lines to her as follows :

'I hear it authentically stated that you will soon be Lady Davenport. I do not believe it. You will not give yourself to anyone who does not possess your soul, and that is already mine. You cannot build up such a wall—the only wall of separation that ever could come between us. I know it is not so, and yet only the thought causes me to shiver, and sends the blood boiling through my veins.'

CHAPTER IV.

A few days after the unexpected meeting on Vesuvius, Mr. Lee's party joined Mr. Atherton's on an excursion to Pompeii. The day proved equally favourable, but with the waning of the full moon Vesuvius had grown sullen, no longer sending up volumes of incense to the skies, nor pouring down its sides the fiery torrents which had contributed such weird sublimity to the scene. Its thunderings had subsided, first into more and more distant mutterings, and then ceased entirely; so that they were able to explore the long-buried city without any fears of a catastrophe similar to the one that had swept the lovely town out of existence nearly two thousand years before. For hours they wandered through the principal streets, visiting all the houses of note, where fragments of beautiful frescoes and mosaics proclaimed the refined tastes of their owners as well as the skill of their artisans. They traversed the ruins of majestic temples, basilicas, forums, theatres, baths, and arches of triumph, Agatha wishing for solitude, that she might the better enjoy the mazes of thought into which these scenes carried her mind.

By special permission they lunched in the beautiful 'House of the Faun,' and fully imbued with the spirit of the place each represented for the time, some character

associated with Pompeii, either by history, romance, or legend.

So well they sustained their parts, with mantles and shawls draped as tunicas, stolas, and togas, that much amusement was afforded by Mrs. Atherton's happy thought, she having been the one to propose the personifications.

'Now that we have ended this child's play,' said Mr. Lee, unpinning the napkin which his daughter had playfully fastened so as to fall in classical folds around his head, 'and I am no longer Sallust, but a man in a monkey jacket and trousers, what is next expected of me? Possibly the next suggestion may be for a sacrifice, and I shall be called upon to officiate as a high-priest—or a victim. Which is it to be, priestess Eumachia?'

Before Agatha could answer, Colonel Potten said, 'One who has had so many sacrifices offered up to her, surely will not demand more.'

'Listen to Glaucus! Young man, I advise you to go home,' said Mr. Jenkins, removing from his head a garland of green rushes he had worn in his character of a gladiator. I advise you, in the most disinterested way, to escape to your domicile, or you will be dragged before the civil tribunal for the crime of making love to a priestess. Fly! the magistrates are on the alert! Remember the fate of Publius Amitistius! It is high sacrilege to make love to the priestess Eumachia. Besides, there is no hope for you; has she not recorded a vow that she will never marry? Diomede, may I take the liberty of asking you to help me on with my overcoat?'

Mr. Clawson, thus called upon, officiated as a valet so satisfactorily as to receive the encouraging assurance that he was born for one.

As the sun declined, a cool breeze came up from the sea ; and, as determined upon previously, they all walked back to the Temple of Jupiter, to obtain another glimpse of the unparalleled view it commands illuminated by those magic hues which the setting sun throws over mountains and ruins alike in Italy, steeping the sea even in shades of ruby, gold, and violet. Here they lingered until the sun went down, and then, hurrying across the Forum, past the Temples of Mercury and Venus, and around by the grand Basilica, they came to Porta della Marina, where their carriages were waiting. Before separating, they arranged to meet the following morning at the little building in the grounds of the Villa Reale, called Pompeiorama, from the dioramic views which it contains of Pompeii, as it now is and as it was in the days of the past, even to delineations of the sports of the gladiators, of the solemn sacrifices, of bridal feasts, and of its last days, when Vesuvius poured over all terrible torrents of ashes and fire. It was here that they realised as never before what the ill-fated city had once been, when ornamented with treasures of art in bronze, and marble, and fresco, and peopled with beautiful women and kingly men, whose gay flowing robes made every group a picture worthy of being transferred to canvas. Streets spanned by triumphal arches, fountains everywhere gushing into mosaic basins or marble cisterns, forums spreading wide their areas, lined with gaily painted corridors, and paved with coloured marbles ; temples of exquisite proportions, embellished with an art that defies competition after the lapse of centuries ; and private houses, small though they be, decorated with a graceful elegance that has never since been attained, even in the dwellings of kings. All this, and more than

can be described, representing the customs and habits of the people of Pompeii, and the enchanting views that surrounded the city, did they find within the walls of the building in the National Garden of Naples; and as they went away from it, all were enthusiastic over the pleasure they had received, excepting Mr. Davenport. He walked silently by the side of Agatha, Colonel Potten having appropriated to himself the other side. Aunt Hester, Mrs. Grey, and Miss Lennox, accompanied by Mr. Lee, Mr. Clawson, and Mr. Atherton, crossed the grounds for a better view of the bay, which was a little turbulent in the equinoctial gale that had been blowing. Mrs. Atherton and Mr. Jenkins were sauntering slowly in the rear.

‘Colonel Potten, you are wanted,’ called Miss Lennox. ‘Pray come and enlighten us as to whether that vessel coming into the harbour is a man-of-war.’ As he approached she lowered her voice. ‘This is only a little *ruse* of mine in behalf of Mr. Davenport.’

‘I was just fancying myself *de trop*, and I thank you for your consideration,’ he answered.

‘My consideration for myself?’ asked Miss Lennox, laughing. ‘I assure you that, with all my philanthropy, I am not quite sure I would have exerted myself in their behalf only that I felt in the mood of talking to you. I want you to tell me what the relationship is between Mr. Clawson and the Athertons.’

‘I think he is a cousin of Mr. Atherton.’

‘I wonder whether he is blind to Mr. Jenkins’s devotion. Really, although it is none of my business, I do wish Mr. Clawson and he would go their own way.’

‘Nonsense; there is nothing wrong about that little woman. She knows what she is about, and is quite able to take care of herself.’

‘I am not so sure of that. She has a wretchedly unhappy look—unsatisfied, as if she had found out too late that her husband’s greatest attraction was his money.’

‘Why, she knew that before she married—she married him with her eyes open. Yet I have heard it was her mother who persuaded her. What strange beings mothers are—ambitious ones, I mean. They think no more of selling a daughter than a man would think of selling a bale of cotton.’

‘You are right ; and when I see how daughters are sacrificed, it helps to reconcile me to having lost my mother when I was too young to know her worth. Possibly, had she lived, I might have been an unhappy wife this very moment, who knows ?’

‘You have suggested a new idea to me, Miss Lennox. Without doubt, a girl who has no mother is more likely to marry for love than one who has. Take Miss Lee for instance, as well as yourself. Everyone knows that you have both had no end of admirers ; and yet, as far as I know, neither of you has ever thought of marriage.’

‘I most certainly never have, for the excellent reason that I once heard given by another—those whom I would have had did not want me, and those who wanted me the old Nick himself would not have taken. But with Agatha it is different. She has had many eligible offers, but never yet fallen in love, I fancy, from all that I have heard her say.’

‘I do not believe she ever will “*fall* in love ;” if she waits for that, I am sure she will never marry.’

‘And I am equally sure that unless she does she will always remain single. I daresay you think, Colonel Potten, that she has passed the age when girls fall in love ; but I once read that the love of youth, when compared with

the love of maturer years, is in strength like the froth on the champagne to the wine itself, and I believe it.'

'Oh no, it is not that I think her too old, by any means; but that she has formed too high an ideal to have any chance of coming across him in this world. I feel quite sure it will be an affair of reason more than of sentiment with her. She is evidently giving Mr. Davenport every opportunity to plead his suit, for I do not agree with Clawson in thinking him an accepted lover.'

'Without doubt *he* is in love with *her*, I should say; but I agree with you in your opinion. He is not yet certain of his prize, but he would be a good match for her in every way.'

'I should not be surprised to hear the engagement announced at any time. Nevertheless, I should maintain my opinion, that it would not be a love match as far as she is concerned; but I daresay, if Davenport succeeds, he will be very well contented, even on such terms, for I am quite sure she would not accept him without telling him just what her feelings are.'

Miss Lennox shook her head. 'Agatha Lee will never marry any man whom she does not love—no, no sooner than I would. A woman who truly loves, if she be true to her instincts, could give herself to the man of her choice, and regret that she had no more to give him; while nothing would tempt her to marry one whom she did not love.'

Colonel Potten, looking in Miss Lennox's face, thought her wonderfully sensible; and more than that, he thought her charming, when upon their eyes meeting he saw in them a softer light than he had ever seen before, and a warm flush spreading over her face.

She continued. 'Mr. Davenport will never win her, and he is by far too fine a man to be jilted ; not that I think Agatha would intentionally deceive him, and lead him on, but her head is so full of Platonic affection that she never suspects any tenderer sentiments in a man, until he declares his love. Mrs. Grey, now, would adore him upon the slightest provocation.'

'Mrs. Grey has a way of adoring every handsome man she meets, has she not ? What a fortunate thing for her that her husband died. Mr. Mortimer's return to America, after his wife's death, must have been a great disappointment.'

'How dreadful ! I did not think you could be so uncharitable. Mrs. Grey is no favourite of yours, I see. I thought you, in common with other men, liked best those women who are a little *légères*.

'For amusement, yes ; for wives, no.'

'I do assure you that you have formed a wrong idea of Mrs. Grey. She is thoughtless—a little giddy perhaps, fond of admiration, and this comprises her list of faults. She is very kind-hearted, very amiable. I have never heard her say an ill-natured word of anyone in my life.'

'That is saying a great deal, and such a quality should cover a multitude of sins. Still, a man appreciates fidelity in a woman more than all other virtues combined, I believe ; and a fickle, frivolous creature, like Mrs. Grey, possesses no attractions for me.'

'A prejudice is as hard to combat in a man as to overcome a fascination. We all have our aversions and our predilections ; there is no accounting for them. Are you a believer in affinities and in Platonic love, Colonel Potten ?'

‘If you mean by affinities some persons being more congenial to you than others, I am a believer, as who is not? but I detest the humbug in the word, since it has been used by so many, as a cloak for all sorts of conjugal infidelities in the spirit if not in the letter. As for Platonic love, I do not believe in its existence. Some women may be capable of a cool and wise affection for a man, but it should be called friendship; and you may rest assured, that, in nine cases out of ten, where there is such a feeling, it will ripen into love.’

‘That is what men always say; yet here is Miss Lee, who has had many friendships, and I have never heard that any of them ever ripened into love. One of my best friends is a married man, and my affection for him is so well reciprocated that his wife calls me her successor.’

‘Bravo! you are coming round upon my side. I think such friendships admirably suited to fit a woman to become a *successor*.’

‘But I do assure you, if he were single, and the only man in the world, I would not marry him; and he knows me entirely too well to wish to marry me.’

Which speech caused Colonel Potten to laugh not a little at her.

When they reached the hotel, Miss Lennox followed Agatha to her room, and in course of conversation repeated what Colonel Potten had said about friendship ripening into love. ‘Is it not vexatious,’ she added, ‘that men are always ready to suspect women of a warmer feeling if they are sufficiently interested in them to feel friendship? I maintain there can be no such thing as the budding of friendship into love; for it is either the one or the other from the first inception of the feel-

ing ; or, to carry out the simile, a budding friendship matures into the flower of friendship. You never hear of falling into friendship ; but to be really in love, you not only fall into it, but you plunge in, head over ears, according to my ideas.'

Agatha was silent.

' I am sure you agree with me,' said Miss Lennox.

Checking the impulse she felt to disclose to her friend the radical change that her views upon this subject had experienced, she replied,

' It is very easy to form theories, and to indulge in speculations ; but I remember a line in an old copy-book, " Experience is the best schoolmaster." I think Colonel Potten partly right and partly wrong—wrong, inasmuch as he says that in nine cases out of ten friendship will ripen into love, whereas I think it must be the rarest thing in the world to do so ; yet, just because of the bare possibility, I am no longer an advocate of Platonic affection.'

' But what harm if friendship does ripen into love ? I would cling to my flag, if I were you. In my opinion, it only goes to prove that men are made of baser clay than women, when they doubt the possibility of a strong friendship existing between them. But even if it does often develop into a warmer sentiment, I would never cease to advocate such friendships. I think the friendship of a noble man throws a charm around life that no woman's friendship can confer. Now, I ask you, what harm could possibly result where two who had fancied themselves to be nothing more than friends should suddenly awaken to the consciousness that they were lovers ! Getting married is not such an awful catastrophe as to deter me from indulging in what Colonel

Potten calls “the calm, cold, wise, sentiment,” for fear of the result.’

‘But if one, or both, were already married, what then?’ asked Agatha.

‘That would be quite impossible, according to my ideas. No *good* married woman, nor man, could ever feel an affection that would conflict with their duties, I am sure.’

‘But supposing they had married without really loving each other, and supposing one of them should find the object of a friendship daily becoming dearer, until the world seemed empty without the presence of that one, would it not be dangerous to indulge in such a friendship under the cloak of Platonic love? This is what Colonel Potten means, and I fully agree with him in denouncing it as a humbug.’

‘But the existence of counterfeit coin does not prove that there are no gold coins. I do not lose my faith in gold because there is a baser metal. No, call it by whatever name you will—friendship, affection, Platonic love—there is nothing in life so desirable until a woman marries and has a husband and children to fill her heart, and engross all her thoughts; and I am not going to renounce my discipleship, although the apostle of Platonism retracts and calls her former belief heresy.’

Agatha smiled, and after a moment’s meditation said, ‘Now, I am going to suppose a case to you. I have often heard you say that you are devoted to the husband of one of your friends, and that he is quite as fond of you. If some day you should find that your friend’s husband had been struggling with a warmer affection for you than he had ever betrayed, and that this knowledge should kindle in your heart a flame, which ——’

‘Stop !’ said Miss Lennox, ‘you are supposing a sheer impossibility. I am not going to be caught in that way, although, *argumentum ad hominum*, I might infer that you had. If any married man ever dared to breathe a sentiment to me, the knowledge of which would even so much as grieve his wife, no matter how much I might have liked him, I should lose all respect for him from that moment. I should say to him, “A man who is incapable of loyalty to his wife is also incapable of loyalty to a friend, and I shall never again consider you my friend.”’

‘I quite agree with you, that that is the right way to feel ; but I do not think anyone knows exactly how one would feel, or what one would say, under such circumstances, until the experience comes. Of course you would say it, as you feel now ; but under other circumstances, you might not only be unable to say it, but unable to feel it also.’

‘I would say it whether I felt it or not. I cannot conceive anything so humiliating as for a woman to feel a sinful love. I should die with the shame of it, if it were possible for me to feel such a love.’

‘This is exactly the point that I wished to arrive at. Would any love that came to you unsought, be a sinful love if not yielded to—if struggled against ? Once I would have called it so, but since I have known more of human nature I have changed my ideas. Have you ever read a book called “On the Heights”?’

‘I tried to read it, but it was too much *on the heights* for me to finish it. It was so sickly in its sentimentalism that I was disgusted with it.’

‘Sickly ? why I have read it over and over, finding nothing but the most healthy sentiments ex-

pressed. If you had followed the poor penitent to the heights where her atonement was made, you could not have failed to appreciate her purity of character. I once laid down the book before finishing it with the same feeling that you express ; but——'

'I read quite far enough to discover her character,' interposed Miss Lennox. 'I did not throw the book down until after she had become the King's mistress.'

'The King's mistress !' echoed Agatha. 'Can it be possible that for one moment you imagined such a thing? What an injustice to the Countess Irma ! I cannot conceive how any woman could so wrong another.'

'Nor can I conceive how a woman possessing common sense could ever read that book and not see that it is so. Why, the plot turns upon that circumstance. If, as you think, she maintained her innocence, why did she suffer such remorse of conscience as followed her treachery to her friend ?'

'It was that for which she suffered remorse. Do you suppose that a woman who was capable of sustaining such relations to the King as you suggest would have been capable of feeling any remorse for it afterwards ?—would have flown from her lover as she fled, obdurate to all his entreaties that she would return ? No, believe me, only a good, pure woman suffers as she suffered, from the knowledge that she had been the means of causing the husband of her friend to waver in his allegiance towards his wife—that she herself had been guilty of indulging in a sentiment rendered unholy because of other ties and other claims. Do you not remember her answer, when her brother applied to her for her interest in his behalf, intimating how great her influence was with the King, and what

the little world of the Court thought of it? I do not think Cæsar's reply, "*And thou too, Brutus?*" surpassed it for pathos. How could you so have wronged the noble-hearted woman?"

'I do not see anything noble in a woman who permits a married man to kiss her, and is exalted into a heaven of bliss by the touch of lips that should have stung her into shame. I daresay I have very homely, matter-of-fact ideas; but I confess that I think the rude Walpurga had a nobler heart than the titled lady.'

'Walpurga was well enough in her way—a good honest woman with not even the shadow of a temptation to combat; but had you read the book critically, you would have discovered a deeper meaning in it than you seem to have found, and in proportion as Irma's character must have been exalted, that of Walpurga might have fallen. The love-making of the coarse valet had no temptation for the honest soul whose heart was with her husband and her child. Had Walpurga loved the valet, and yet never listened to one tender word from his lips, then she would have been the superior of the Countess, who for a few brief days stood dizzy upon the edge of the vortex of the King's passion for her, and had not strength to turn away. That she did at last escape from it without being engulfed, that she resisted the letters he wrote, madly pleading for her return, that she devoted her life to the penance of isolation from the world, proved her innocence and her worth.'

'Well, you may think so; but I still think it would have been better proven if, when the King first pressed her hand, she had given him a look that would have prevented him from pressing it again; and when he kissed her, either have threatened to tell his wife, or else have given up her

situation at Court. But, dear me,' rising to leave, 'I am sure Mr. Davenport is waiting for you; he is a great monopolist, and looked terribly bored to-day at the prospect of another excursion in force, when we arranged for Baiæ to-morrow. He would prefer to visit all these places with you alone, I know.'

' Do not get such an idea in your head. Mr. Davenport is no more to me than Colonel Potten is to you. I think, Laura, we may congratulate ourselves upon having secured two genuine friends at last, without any nonsense about them, don't you ? '

' As far as Colonel Potten is concerned, I am quite sure of him. I cannot say as much of Mr. Davenport. If I were you, I would not place too great reliance upon his friendship, for I think there is very little of the "calm, cold, wise sentiment" in his feeling for you.'

' Absurd ! He has been with us so long that we are really quite on brotherly and sisterly terms, and he would laugh at the idea of any other sentiment as soon as I would.'

Miss Lennox looked back over her shoulder at Agatha as she left the room.

' Take my advice, dear ; don't trust your brother.'

CHAPTER V.

THE day following, appointed for the excursion to Baiæ, proved to be as heavenly as the preceding ones. Mr. Clawson, receiving a large supply of letters and journals from his banker that morning, concluded he would remain behind to read them, and the party set off at an early hour without him, for Mr. Clawson had a weakness for the latest news, and was always well posted concerning all that was going on.

‘These excursions are too much for Mr. Clawson,’ said Mr. Jenkins, who with Colonel Potten was seated in the carriage *vis-à-vis* to Mrs. Atherton and Miss Lennox. ‘You know at home he is never visible before one o’clock post meridian, on ordinary occasions.’

‘I should survive if he were never visible,’ replied Miss Lennox.

‘You are awfully severe upon Clawson lately; has the man been making love to you?’

‘He is too much in love with himself to make love to anyone. I am heartily glad he has stayed at home for several reasons.’

‘Pray tell us the reasons,’ said Mrs. Atherton.

‘He eats more than his share of mandarins, that is the principal reason; and then, as we are going to take a sail out from Baiæ to the coral reefs, all our pleasure might be destroyed because he is so afraid of the water.’

‘Really, is Mr Clawson afraid of the water?’

‘He is so afraid of it that he never touches it to drink.’

Mr. Jenkins shook his head sagely, looking very demure, as if perplexed over some question that had arisen in his mind. At last he said,

‘Potten, this looks suspicious. I have always heard that when a woman begins by abusing a man, she ends by marrying him. I shall make a note of this.’

‘As you did the other day about Agatha Lee and Mr. Davenport. How is it that all men think women, after they have reached a certain age, are so desirous of marrying that they will take anyone who offers? Make your note, Mr. Jenkins; it will serve as a reminder of the mistake you have made, in judging of matters that you know nothing about. A woman who marries for any other reason than love had better take poison as the quickest way of ending her sufferings.’

‘I don’t agree with you,’ said Mr. Jenkins. ‘She had much better make the best of it, and get all she can out of life.’

At this moment Miss Lennox, recalled to remembrance by the expression upon Mrs. Atherton’s face, as she and Mr. Jenkins exchanged a glance, changed the conversation.

It was a charming drive to the Temple of Serapis, where, while taking their breakfast, as is the custom with excursionists, a carriage drove up, and Mr. Clawson arrived in time to get his share of the mandarins. He had a budget of news. Mr. Marston, who had all his life been so fastidious in his choice of a wife, that no woman, who had even fancied herself in love but once in her life, could have tempted him to offer at her

shrine his immaculate affections, was engaged to Mrs. Barlow.

'How men do get taken in ! That woman is not only a widow, but she has had no end of affairs,' he said, addressing Agatha, who had not a word to say in her defence. Mr. Clawson continued, 'There are lots of engagements announced, and no end of people, whom we all know, coming over ; among others, Carroll Tracey. A queer feeling he must have when he meets Mortimer. I beg your pardon, Miss Lee, I quite forgot Frank Mortimer was your cousin.'

Agatha's face had reddened at the first mention of Carroll Tracey ; and Mr. Davenport, always on the alert, now hastened to withdraw attention from her by telling an experience of Mr. Clawson's at a dinner where he had been called upon to make a speech in French. It was one of Mr. Clawson's weaknesses not to admit that he was not equally at home in the French language as in his mother tongue ; and he never lost an opportunity for airing the little that he knew. That his doing so was a source of amusement to his companions never in the least disconcerted him ; and now he confirmed Mr. Davenport's account, insisting that he had done both himself and his country justice.

'I wish you would repeat the speech ; I would like to hear it above all things,' said one.

'Do tell us what you said,' said another. All were vociferous for the speech.

'Certainly, I will tell you what I can remember of it. I commenced by expressing my great regret that my limited knowledge of——'

'Oh, but tell us in French, not in English,' said Miss Lennox. 'We all want to hear the *original* French, don't we, Mr. Jenkins ?'

‘Certainly we do. I am sure that all the point would be lost in translating it. By all means, we must hear it in French.’

‘You should have been at the dinner, then. I am sorry that you have lost the opportunity, but I never address an audience in any language but its own. Some one of the number might not understand the French language, you know, and find it *très-embarrassant*.’

Attention having been diverted from Agatha, and time given her to recover, Mr. Davenport now seconded Mr. Lee’s efforts to get them all started on their tour of sight-seeing. After a slight survey of the ruins of the Temples of Neptune and of the Nymphs, of the site of Cicero’s villa, and the Amphitheatre, they turned aside to visit the half-extinct volcano of Solfatara, Lake Avernus, and the grotto of the Sibyl; then proceeded to Baiæ, or rather to the site of that town, once so celebrated for its superb temples and magnificent palaces and villas, as well as for its wanton reign of luxury and profligacy in the days when as a Roman watering-place it had no equal. Now, even as then, one might well say, ‘Nothing in the world can be compared with the lovely Bay of Baiæ,’ though of all its costly splendour there remains only the desolate ruins of temples, baths, and theatres; endless masses of ancient, crumbling masonry, fragments of mosaic, traces of vast piers, and innumerable vaulted passages. The rare beauty of the day tempted them to prolong the sail which they took out to the coral reefs. Only for the ripples in the water that the oars made, they would have seemed to float ‘upon a plane of light between two heavens of azure.’ Miss Lennox quoted Shelley, and compared Capri and Ischia to huge vaporous amethysts quivering through the aerial gold

that flooded nature. Agatha sat speechless, her dreamy eyes taking in all the exquisite beauty of the scene, although her mind was far away. All were more or less impressed and subdued by the indescribable beauty that surrounded them, so that all jesting subsided, and even their low laughter died away.

Mr. Jennings began to feel the stillness oppressive.

'If this weird silence continues, I cannot answer for the consequences,' he said. 'I feel a desperate inclination to make love to some one. I am sure Clawson will end by proposing to Miss Lennox, whom he is eyeing so sentimentally.'

'I would if I had a show of encouragement, but Miss Lennox always frowns down all my efforts to make myself agreeable. Potten, supposing you try your luck; you may succeed better.'

Glancing at Miss Lennox, Colonel Potten saw her cheeks suffused with colour. Her usual *présence d'esprit* seemed to have forsaken her.

'I might have done so long since had not Miss Lennox once told me that she never would marry a widower,' he said boldly; and Miss Lennox, suddenly recovering her self-possession, exclaimed,

'What a fib! I never said such a thing in my life. I have a weakness for widowers.'

Everyone laughed, but of course understood it as the jest was intended to be understood. Colonel Potten did not forget it, however; once or twice after this he found himself comparing Miss Lennox with Agatha, and always in favour of the former. He recalled an adage that his mother had often quoted to him in his youth: 'Fine sense and exalted sense is very well in its way, but sound common sense is much better.' The current of his

mind, once set in this channel, he permitted it to bear him on, to the resolving of all the 'pros. and cons.' of such a project ; and that very evening, after musing over it in his room at the hotel, he finally arose from the arm-chair in which he had been enjoying his reverie, and pacing the floor indulged in this soliloquy :—

' The more I see of her, the better I like her. She is most excellent company—no blue devils where she is. She is not erratic in any of her views, nor is she sentimental. If I am but lucky enough to win her heart, and I have sometimes fancied that I might win it, I know well that she would make a good wife. And then, she has a fortune in her own right, and it will not be a bad thing to put our money together. I believe she is the very one for me.'

After that evening, Colonel Potten's attentions to Miss Lennox were such as to leave no one in doubt as to their nature ; excepting Miss Lennox herself, who was the last to become enlightened.

From Naples they all went to Sorrento, settling down in that most homelike of pensions, Villa Nardi.

It was here that, as Colonel Potten and Miss Lennox were strolling along the cliffs one morning, under the boughs of the orange-groves, he said,

' Do you remember once classifying your lovers under two heads—those whom you would not have, and those who would not have you ? Are you going to number me in the first category ? '

Miss Lennox looked a little confused as she answered, ' No, for you are on my list of friends.'

' But what if I want to be more than a friend ; how then ? I am not going to make love to you like a schoolboy, Miss Lennox ; but I do assure you that if you will

confer upon me the happiness that it will give me to make you my wife, I will in return make you as happy as I can ; and I feel that I can make you very happy.'

They were standing by the low parapet, and Miss Lennox was looking down to the foot of the precipice where the dappled aquamarine and emerald waters of the bay were breaking in whispered murmurs against the rocks. For a few moments she was too much agitated to answer. This was not the love-making she had dreamed of in bygone days, nor was it such as her riper years still longed for; but the man who stood beside her was the only one whom she had ever loved, and she could not hear with indifference any words that came from his lips. Her hesitation was not unremarked by Colonel Potten, neither did he fail to see the agitation which caused her bosom to swell, and a tremulous sigh to escape her. He took the hand that rested upon the parapet.

' Will you not give me this little hand for my own, and with it the treasure that I covet—the heart of the dearest and best and loveliest woman that I know ? '

She felt the magnetism of his touch, and, looking straight into his eyes, she answered,

' This seems like a dream to me, but even though it be a dream, I still like to say to you that you can have the hand if you care for it, nor am I ashamed to tell you now that I gave you the heart long, long before you asked for it.'

As she spoke her face glowed with the happiness within, and Colonel Potten was more than contented—he was happy. He drew the hand that now belonged to him within his arm, and, pacing up and down the shaded alleys of the orange grove, he drew from her the confes-

sion that, during all these years, in which no thought but of friendship for her had come to him, she had held in her heart the love which he had awakened in her girlhood, concealing it so carefully that he had never dreamed that it was there. He asked question after question, eager to hear all of this new revelation, which was to him the sweetest balm that his vanity had ever received.

In justice to him it must be said that, however much reason might have influenced him in making his decision, or self-interest have assisted that decision to its culminating point, as each day passed away his betrothed took more complete possession of his heart, until he was as much in love as her most exacting moods could have demanded.

‘Fate has done better for Colonel Potten than he would have done for himself,’ said Mr. Lee one day to Agatha.

‘In what respect?’ she asked.

‘I fancy he once thought he would like to marry my cold-hearted daughter; and I think Miss Lennox much better adapted to making a mortal happy than one who lives in the clouds and will never stoop to any being short of a demi-god. I know a man who has an honest, sincere love for you; whom, as you must marry some day, my daughter, it would make me very happy to see you united to, but I have not dared to give him any encouragement further than to let him know that he has my consent to address you.’

‘Papa, how could you?’ said Agatha. ‘You must not think of such a thing. It is out of the question; and the sooner that he understands that it is so, the better it will be for all of us. I do not wish to lose him as a friend, it is true; but to retain him at the price of

having him for a lover is quite impossible. That would be terrible.'

'I do not see anything so very terrible in it. On the contrary, I have already told him that he has my best wishes for his success.'

'How can you be so cruel? And I think it very unkind in Mr. Davenport to enlist you in his behalf. But it will do no good, for I will never marry.'

'You may be quite sure that I shall permit you to make your own choice; but if you ask your Aunt Hester's advice, she will tell you that a life of single blessedness is a lonely life.'

'And I am sure Aunt Hester would tell me that loneliness is better to bear than married life where love is wanting on either side.'

'Mr. Davenport has enough to make any reasonable woman happy; he really is very fond of you, and he will have some day a position in England that I should be proud to see you share. Do nothing in haste, my child. I feel quite sure that he is a man whom you could learn to love.'

'I have never believed in learning to love,' replied Agatha. 'It pains me to go contrary to your wishes in anything; but now that I know what Mr. Davenport's wishes are, I must make haste to show him that friendship is all that I have, or ever will have, to give him.'

The same evening, Aunt Hester opened the subject, and Agatha listened to all that her aunt had to say, and she had a great deal; waxing eloquent concerning Mr. Davenport's personal attractions, as well as the advantages that would accrue to her from such an alliance. After her aunt had finished, Agatha said,

“And Satan took Him up into a mountain, and said, All these things shall be thine, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.”

‘Is it kind, Agatha, when your father and I only have your happiness and interest at heart, to take such a view of our motives? I feel sure that you would be a far happier woman as Mr. Davenport’s wife than you will be if you persist in your resolution never to marry. You do not know the weary length of the road that lies before you when you assert such a determination. If Mr. Davenport were an unlovable man, I would never urge you to marry him as I do now.’

‘If he were ever so lovable, and had not a magnificent home to give me, do you think that you and my father would be as anxious that I should accept him? Why, Aunt Hester, how can papa, most of all, how can you, try to tempt me to give myself, soul and body, into the keeping of a man for whom I have not the love that makes marriage the holy covenant that it is, when two are united who are all the world to each other? I am not devoid of ambition, and it is possible that at one time in my life I might have been dazzled by all that Mr. Davenport has to offer me, that I might have beguiled myself into thinking the regard that I feel for him might grow into an affection sufficiently strong to secure happiness to both of us in marriage, but I know better now. My whole heart is given to another, to whom I hope to belong in another world, though never in this.’

‘Nonsense. Don’t talk in that way. There is neither marrying nor giving in marriage in another world; and although when one is lifted up from earth by that exaltation which strong feeling gives to the soul, one may

talk of such impossibilities—it all ends in talk. If you are so unfortunate as to feel such sentiments for one who is already married, the best thing you can do is to dispossess yourself of them as speedily as possible by entering into such duties and relations as will enable you to overcome an affection which can only be a constant source of misery and danger to you throughout your life. I am firmly convinced that were you to marry Mr. Davenport the time will come when you will be thankful that you did not sacrifice his happiness and your own to a passing passion, the indulgence of which would have been a sin.'

' Listen to me, Aunt Hester ; this is all sophistry. I know that it is, and you know it, as well as I do. I have only had half-confidences with you, but now I will tell you more than I have as yet told you. It is no longer a sin for me to love the man whom I do love. His wife is dead ; and although I have refused to marry him, I consider myself as much belonging to him as if we were married.'

Aunt Hester sat for a few moments as if spellbound. At last she said,

' If the man is free to marry, why do you refuse to marry him ? '

' It is the penance I have inflicted on myself for having loved him when he had a wife. So only could I relieve myself from the intense humiliation that followed my knowledge of the nature of our affection for each other.'

' Nonsense ; marry the man, and you will have penances enough without going so far out of your way to encounter them. You have no right to trifle with his happiness, and your own. Who is the man ? '

‘I have no objections to telling you now, Aunt Hester ; but you must keep my secret as faithfully as you have kept your own. You must not even talk to me about him, for everything in connection with him is still so fresh that it is like touching an open wound.’

‘Who is the man ?’ asked Aunt Hester, again.

‘Carroll Tracey.’

‘Merciful God ! Is it possible you did not know that he is dead ?’

‘Dead !’ echoed Agatha, and her face grew so white and rigid that it looked like a face of stone. ‘Dead ! I do not believe it ;’ but as Aunt Hester noted her stony rigidity, her marble whiteness, she knew that a conviction of the truth had seized hold of Agatha’s heart with an iron grasp.

CHAPTER VI.

How terrible to Agatha was the night that followed! Not a doubt was left upon her mind, for Aunt Hester knew that certainty was less cruel than suspense; and looking up the journal that had announced his death, and which spoke of his loss to the literary world, she gave it to her to read before they separated for the night.

All that night the rain fell, dripping, dripping, with a dreary monotonous splash on the cold flagstones, and the gaunt branches of the weird olive trees swayed and moaned in the rising wind; the sea dashed against the rocky coast, and vaporous shadows flitted over its broad expanse. All night Agatha sat by her chamber window—so benumbed, almost frozen with grief, as it were, that not one tear came to her relief. Her heart ached with a dull heavy pain, now and then breaking into an anguished throb. Morning came, and with the first rays of light she threw herself upon her bed, burying her face in her pillow, moaning as if her heart would break. It seemed as though the sun ought to go out in darkness, now that he was gone from earth. Wearied and worn out by her night of anguish, she slept at last; and in her sleep she seemed to be floating in immensity, in Carroll Tracey's arms, nothing visible but the blue vault of heaven, sprinkled with golden stars, and his face bent lovingly over her. 'Where are we, Carroll?' she

asked 'This is eternity, my darling,' he answered ; and they floated onwards, ever approaching nearer to the holy lamps that were glittering above them. How long she slept she did not know ; but at last she awakened, and almost before she had had time to recall the agony she had lived through, her eyes fell upon a letter that her maid, entering noiselessly, had left on the bed beside her. She took it up. It was Carroll's seal ! Carroll's handwriting ! There was a sound in her ears as of rushing waters, and the bed on which she lay seemed revolving like a wheel in the intensity of her emotions. As she held it pressed convulsively to her heart, she exclaimed, 'Oh ! Carroll, Carroll, how cruel I have been to you ! how cruel I have been to myself ! Would to God I had given myself to you as you wished ; and now it is too late—*for ever, too late.*' She broke the seal at last, tears streaming down her cheeks ; and as she opened the sheet a scrap of newspaper fell out. She picked it up : it was the same piece her Aunt Hester had given her to read. What could it mean ? Her eager eyes swept the page ; but before she had read all, with a cry of joy she exclaimed, 'It is not too late. I am yours, Carroll, for time as well as for eternity.'

Mrs. Tracey's death had given rise to the report, and occasioned the paragraph that had gone the rounds of the New York papers, some eager journalist having inserted it upon hearsay ; and Mr. Tracey, wishing to spare Agatha all pain, had written to her as soon as he had seen the journal that contained the intelligence. The letter, written in America, had been delayed in its transmission by being forwarded from one place to another, or it would have reached her and saved her that time of dreadful suffering. But that night had accomplished

what, with her fixedness of purpose, might never otherwise have been attained. It had brought her to realise the folly of the course which she had contemplated, as well as that to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God, is more than all penances, or sacrifices, or oblations, in His sight.

Agatha read again and again the long impassioned letter, filled with words of tender unwavering trust in her, despite all the rumours that had reached him of her betrothal ; and before the day ended she had written in reply, telling him that, in seeking after more exalted duties, she had lost sight of those that lay nearest to her ; and how one night of stormy suffering had swept away the clouds that obscured her moral vision, and all had been made as clear to her as was the brilliant morning light that followed the dark hours in which her watch of agony had been kept.

‘ You ask me when you may come to me,’ she wrote. ‘ When another year comes around, I shall hope to see you. I have been reading “ Callista,” a story of the third century, supposed to have been written by Cardinal Wiseman, and I must copy a few lines for you, which seemed, as I read them, to have come from your pen, so exactly do they embody ideas that you have expressed to me. But first, let me tell you, I have renounced my faith in Platonic affection. I no longer approve of the indulgence of any affinities, excepting between those who are married or about to marry. It is dreadful for me to have to recant, but the voice within that demands it will not be stifled. These are the words of Agellius speaking to Callista : “ There is between you and me so strange a unity of thought that I should have deemed it quite impossible before I found it actually to exist, between

any two persons whatever, and which to me is inexplicable. There is an unaccountable correspondence in the views we take of things, in our impressions, in the line in which our minds move, and the issues to which they come, in our judgment of what is great and little, and the manner in which objects affect our feelings. When I speak to others, they do not understand me, nor I them ; and I am solitary, however much they talk. But to my astonishment I find between you and me one language. Is it wonderful that I should fancy that He who has made us alike, has made us for each other?" I too feel that *we* were made for each other, and I no longer deny myself the sweet hope of one day being your wife. Your long silence perplexed me not a little ; then came that precious sonnet of Mrs. Browning's in your handwriting, followed by a few dear lines of your own ; and now, this letter which shows me that you were right. We cannot write letters such as an ordinary friendship would sanction : we must be all or nothing to each other. I detect in your letter traces of the wound which I inflicted in giving you no notice of our intended departure for Europe ; but in all that has since occurred we cannot be sufficiently thankful that you did not remain upon this side, as you might have done had you known that I was coming abroad. No, everything has happened for the best. Now we must wait and trust the hand that has led us so far, in order to bring our separate ways into one path. I will write as often as you wish. The year will pass swiftly ; and when the time of our separation ends, our duties to each other and to the dead will have been so fulfilled that no one can say we have been wanting in proper respect for either.'

Agatha closed her letter, sealed it, and walked with it to the post. On her way she was joined by Mr.

Davenport, who professed great curiosity concerning the letter. A way of escape from the pain of refusing him dawned upon her mind.

‘Will you answer me one question concerning that letter?’ he said.

‘I have not the slightest objection to answering any that you may ask about the person to whom it is addressed, always provided that you will consider my answers confidential,’ replied Agatha, suppressing, as well as she could, the agitation which this bold avowal caused her, and holding the letter so that he could read the superscription.

‘Carroll Tracey!’ he exclaimed. ‘The very man I was warned against as possessing your heart. Is it possible that you have been corresponding with him all this time?’

‘My letters heretofore have only been friendly ones; but I intend to write very often now, as I have promised in this letter that some day I will be his wife,’ she replied, summoning all her moral courage to her aid, and feeling how agreeable it would be if she could retain him as her friend by giving him her confidence. ‘But who could have warned you against him, pray?’

‘It was as long ago as the Assembly ball, when you were in Philadelphia,’ he answered, making brave efforts to keep from showing the chagrin that he felt. ‘I was foolish enough to get very angry with my informant. It was one of the few occasions in my life when my temper got the better of me, and for this reason I remember it.’

Mr. Davenport said but little during the remainder of his walk, and upon their return to the hotel he informed Mr. Lee that business of an imperative nature enforced his immediate return to England.

‘Agatha, you have had something to do with Mr.

Davenport's hurried departure,' said Mr. Lee, the next morning after he had taken leave of them.

'Then he is a very ungrateful man, for I have given him such a proof of my regard for his friendship as I never gave to anyone before. In order to save him from the pain of refusing the offer of marriage which you told me he would make, I informed him yesterday that I was engaged to be married.'

'Engaged to be married!' exclaimed Mr. Lee, with pretty much the same tone of voice and startled look in which he would have said, 'engaged to be murdered.'

'Yes,' answered Agatha, 'I am engaged at last; but for a year at least it is to be kept a profound secret. No one but you, Aunt Hester, and Mr. Davenport, are to know of it beside ourselves.'

'And will you have the kindness to inform me who "ourselves" includes? I have not the slightest idea who the personage can be, who has not thought me of sufficient account to consult in the matter; and who has so suddenly made you forget your resolution *never* to marry.'

'Papa, he would have consulted you, but I told him at first that I never would marry him, because—because—well, it was not because I did not love him enough; but there were various reasons, the most weighty of which was that he had a wife from whom he was di—'

'What!' exclaimed Mr. Lee, pitching his voice in its highest key. 'Are you going to marry a Mormon? Who, in the name of heaven, is the man?'

'Carroll Tracey, papa; he will write and ask your consent, and you must not refuse it, for he is the best and noblest man I have ever known—the only one whom I ever could marry.'

'I do not understand how all this came about,' said Mr. Lee, looking thoroughly bewildered.

'Neither do I,' answered Agatha. 'I did not intend to marry him, but when Aunt Hester told me that he was dead, I found out what my life would be without him ; and when his letter came, the next day, I was able to see that the path of our united happiness was also the path of my duty. At first, I refused to be his wife because I *thought* it was right for me to refuse. I have accepted him now, because I *know* I am right in so doing; and, papa, you must give me your blessing.'

'I most certainly will give you my blessing, child ; but I shall never be able to understand how you could refuse Ormus Davenport for such a man as Carroll Tracey. Ah, well ! the boy-god *is* blind : there's no doubt about it.'

"The heart is a river, and flows where it will," Lamartine tells us,' rejoined Agatha. 'But I am sure you would rather see me the happiest of women, as Carroll Tracey's wife, than the most wretched of mortals, as I would be did I marry any man, even were he a king, who did not possess every iota of my heart ; and Carroll *is* a king among men in my eyes. The lesson of Mrs. Atherton's marriage is not one that I wish to learn by experience. If ever a woman repented selling herself for money, she does. She finds no companionship, no sympathy, intellectually or physically, in her husband ; I have seen the look of loathing in her eyes when he approaches her, for she has one of those highly-strung and sensitive nervous organisations that is not capable of mere passive indifference. The very thought of being chained in such a way, of giving myself as an absolute property, without reserve, makes me shudder.'

For a few moments Mr. Lee remained thoughtfully silent : then he said,

‘ After all, you are right, my child ; quite right. Mr. Tracey is on this side, I believe ; when is he going to join you ? ’

‘ No, he is still in America ; but has written to ask when he may come to us. I prefer that he should wait until next year. He will then have been divorced two years, and it will be a year since Mildred left us ; and my own sense of what is right and proper will be satisfied, and Mrs. Grundy will have less to say than were he to join us now.’

‘ Quite right, my dear, quite right ; I agree with you entirely. When do Miss Lennox and Colonel Potten expect to be married ? ’

‘ On our return to Rome. Everything is arranged ; you are to give the bride away ; I am to be first bridesmaid ; and there is to be a grand wedding breakfast ; and then they are to start off for the North Pole, or some place in its vicinity, where the midnight sun is to be seen ; and we are to go to Venice, you know ; and then, if you and Aunt Hester are willing, I would like to go by Trieste, Vienna, and Warsaw, into Russia.’

‘ I am quite ready, and your aunt thinks only of your wishes ; so you will have it all your own way, as you always do. Where are the Athertons going ? ’

‘ They wish to go over the Italian lakes, to Venice with us ; then they will return to Verona, and go through the Tyrol and the Engadine, I believe. Mrs. Atherton made a dreadful speech the other day. I should think she must be out of her mind to say anything so wanting in refinement. Mr. Jenkins was asking what our plans were ; when I told him that we were going to Venice he

turned to her, and, lifting his eyebrows, said, "And where are *you* going, Mrs. Atherton?" She answered, "I am going to the de'il," using the stronger word, however.

'Hum! marriage without love must be a hell on earth for a woman of great sensibility.'

They both had occasion in after days to recall Mrs. Atherton's words.

CHAPTER VII.

THE marriage of Colonel Potten and Miss Lennox took place at Rome. Mr. Clawson made a speech at the wedding breakfast, which Mr. Jenkins declared was made up from Murray's guide-book for Central Italy, and 'Roba di Roma ;' stating boldly that the only part of it that was original was the French phrases with which it was interlarded. Within the week that followed the departure of the bride and groom, all were on their way to their various destinations.

The summer passed pleasantly but slowly to Agatha ; the days seemed endless ; and she often thought of Carroll Tracey's wish that he could go to sleep and not waken until the day of their meeting should arrive ; yet each day brought some new pleasure in the way of sight-seeing, and not a week passed that did not bring her letters that were so full of tenderness that she scarcely knew whether they did not make her long for him more than they helped her to bear his absence. Mr. Lee and his sister had particularly wished to stay longer in the quaint old city of Moscow, but Agatha had hurried them back to St. Petersburg, where she found the letters she had expected awaiting them at their banker's. Never had she received a letter from him more precious than the one of latest date ; she carried it with her, next to her heart, when they took their afternoon drive over

the broad grand streets, past buildings superbly magnificent, into the green country where the roads were bordered with villas, with their endless flower beds, and fountains flashing in the sun's setting rays ; on, on, still on, under avenues of trees, to the borders of the sea, where the occupants of the carriages alight, pacing the sands, or chatting in groups under the broad spreading trees. Mr. Lee and Aunt Hester left the carriage, but Agatha remained ; she was in no mood for talking. She felt borne up, on angel's wings as it were, into Paradise —that paradise of love, which no other can surpass, in the rapture that comes to those whose souls are mated and interlocked as they walk its streets of pearl and gold together. What if, in time, the pearl grows less opalescent, the gold becomes dim ?—it is still gold, it is still pearl, and though time may sully, eternity will renew its brightness.

Agatha drew her letter from its hiding-place next to her heart, and read the sweet lines, the vaporous golden atmosphere intensifying the beauty of sea, earth, and sky, while every now and then she glanced around to take it all in in full measure, for her spirit was in harmony with all. And these were the lines that she dwelt oftenest upon :

‘ Never were days so long as these ; how can I wait through months of such days, then ? Be merciful, my darling, and let me come to you sooner. Every morning I count the days that remain, every night I go to sleep thinking how we will first meet. Have you the dress you wore when we parted last, and which I kissed when we parted ? I imagine you with that dress on, coming to meet me ; and over and over I fancy how I will take you in my arms and cover you with kisses. I never knew how to wait ; and now I know

less than ever. I wish at least autumn were here ; above all, I wish that your travels were ended, and that you were settled down, where I would not be tortured as I am by the fear of some accident happening to you. I want you more and more every day. When once you are my wife, darling, I will be very exacting ; you must always stay where I can see you—so near, that I can touch you as I write, to repay me for this cruel waiting. I cannot live without you any more. To some people the absence of those dear to them is hard to bear in the beginning, but time brings them patience. Not so with me. I was more resigned at first, but every day increases my impatience and my longing. It is useless to try to divert my mind. I try to write more than usual, to read as much as possible, to take longer rides, even to go a little more into society ; it is all useless. Through everything I am constantly repeating to myself,

The widest land

Doom takes to part us, leaves my heart in hers—

and your eyes are following me everywhere. Those dear, adored eyes! how can you have the heart to keep me an exile from their tender light? Were there ever such eyes on earth before as yours? How they haunt me! No ; such eyes belong only to heaven, I often fear, and what agony lies in the thought! Do you remember our first parting? How dear we were to each other then, and now are we not ten thousand times dearer? I have the photograph of yourself that you sent me, but I dare not look at it as often as I would, for it only increases my intense longing to hold you to my heart You must be tired to hear always the same things repeated over and over again ; but I cannot help it. Can

I change my words when my heart is filled to overflowing with the same thoughts? It is a necessity for me to write to you, even if I do only repeat what you know quite as well as I know. It is not for you I write as much as it is for myself. Next to seeing you is writing to you, and receiving your letters. Would that they came to me a little oftener! Never will you know what I suffer in this separation.'

Letters like these were the angel's wings that bore Agatha up above the earth, and each letter that arrived did but make her long for his presence more. When they left St. Petersburg they made the passage across the Baltic, so enchanting with its numerous islands, stopping at the little towns in Finland, and reaching Stockholm in a humour to be pleased with everything. But here, as everywhere, Agatha's thoughts followed her soul, and nothing that was beautiful in nature or in art did she see that she did not long for Carroll to enjoy it with her. Their daily drives lay through grand old evergreen forests, carpeted with tufted green moss, and crowded at intervals with rocks that were mantled with the same soft, rich, velvety verdure. The park with its extended grounds, the largest that Europe boasts, was their favourite resort; and where in the world is there in pleasure-grounds a drive to equal in its wild beauty that of Queen Christina's way? Ulricksdal, Drottningholm, Skökloster, Gripsholm Castle, at the further end of the beautiful Lake Malar, together with many other points of interest, were at last visited; and then they went out of their way to visit the picturesque falls of Trollhätten, returning to go into Norway, where some weeks were passed in various excursions to its most beautiful fiords,—to the Romsdaler,

and over the Dovréfjeld to Drontheim. Then coming back to Bergen, they took the steamer down that wild coast, so unlike any other, with its lovely fiords girdled by rocky ramparts of every conceivable form and variety. Arrived at Copenhagen, they passed several days in this quaint old city; and then, by Hamburg and Cologne, they kept on their way back to Italy, stopping a few days at some of the most interesting places on the route. After leaving Cologne, they received no letters until they reached Florence. Here, a large package was awaiting them, and now they learned of the mysterious disappearance of Mrs. Atherton in Paris. She had been thrown from her horse, in crossing one of the passes in Switzerland, and at the time her physician had feared some injury to her brain, but she had apparently recovered, and had reached Paris seemingly in good health. The very night of her arrival she had told her maid that she did not need her services that night, and had last been seen by her sitting at her toilet-table in her bed-room. Mr. Atherton had retired earlier to his own chamber, and did not know until the following morning that his wife had not even laid her head upon her pillow. All her trunks and her satchels were found untouched; not even her hat nor her mantle were missing. Her purse, filled with gold coin, lay upon her dressing-table. They could suppose nothing but that she had walked out of the house in a state of mental aberration, and possibly, as the distressed husband feared, jumped into the Seine. Mr. Atherton telegraphed for his relative, Mr. Clawson, who was in Switzerland; and upon his arrival no effort was spared to obtain some trace of the missing woman—some clue to her whereabouts, if she were still living; for Mr. Clawson stated that upon

several occasions she had spoken to him of her intention to enter a convent. The secret police were on the alert, rewards were offered, the Morgue was visited daily; but weeks rolled away, and no tidings came of Mrs. Atherton. Mr. Jenkins had parted from them upon their arrival, and left at once for Havre, to sail for America. This was the information that one of Agatha's letters from Mrs. Potten contained; and she, with her aunt and father, were lost in their conjectures as to the mystery. Had Mrs. Atherton's mind really been injured by her fall, causing her to stray away and lose herself in that Babylon of a city? or had she from sheer weariness of life put an end to her existence?

'After all, Agatha, there is nothing like love to make life desirable. I am glad that you insisted upon having your own will: you always managed to have it in some way. I remember, when you were about as high as this table, you used to say, "I would rather not, if you please," which with you meant, to all intents and purposes, "I won't!"'

'Is it not much better to have a mind of your own than to be turned around by every wind that blows, like a weather-vane?' asked Agatha.

'Certainly it is; but what will you do, when you have a husband, whose will *must* be law? You will have to promise to love, honour, and obey, you know.'

'I am going to marry a man whom I trust so implicitly that I know he never will require any obedience from me that I cannot render with my whole heart. I do not believe in that love that makes reservations and refuses to yield that obedience which both divine and human laws require.'

Mr. Lee laughed heartily.

‘All this sounds very heroic ; but just wait until you have been married a year or two, and then tell me your opinion. It is a great mistake to make the woman promise to obey, for it is the man who does all the obeying. The weaker sex have a wonderful facility for becoming the stronger sex in matrimonial alliances. But who are your other letters from ?’

‘There are several from Carroll, and one from Mr. Jenkins, who wrote just before sailing. How very strange that he should have written to me !’

‘What does he say ?’

‘He comments upon Mrs. Atherton’s disappearance as coolly as if he had not been the devoted cavalier that we have seen he was ; he thinks she has been “queer” for some time, and suggests that she may have entered a convent, as she told him she intended to become a Roman Catholic. He adds that he hopes to return to Europe soon, and may possibly meet us in Italy this winter.

‘And what does Mr. Tracey write ?’

‘Oh, as usual, he scolds over this long separation ; and says a great deal which I like to read, but which you would skip if you had the reading of the letters. The last was written October 1st, almost one month ago, and I cannot understand why there are none of later date.’

Meantime, Aunt Hester, who also received letters, had left the room, looking in once to say, ‘Are you quite sure we will remain here through the month of November ?’

‘Quite sure,’ replied Mr. Lee, ‘and not one day longer. I remember what December is in Florence, and have no wish to pass another such cold month here. Why did you ask, Hester ?’

‘Only for information,’ she replied, closing the door quickly, as though she wished to avoid further questioning.

When dinner was served, Aunt Hester was not to be found. She had apparently disappeared as mysteriously as Mrs. Atherton ; but not as alarming a disappearance, as her maid had disappeared with her.

When she joined them at last at the dinner-table, looking just the least flushed, Agatha at once asked her where she had been, to which question Aunt Hester replied that she had been to post an important letter.

‘It is plain to be seen that Aunt Hester has an affair of her own on hand,’ said Agatha.

Aunt Hester smiled and looked wise, but said nothing.

How lovely Florence was in the ripe, rich beauty of those autumn days ! Still, Agatha was not as happy as she had been, for day followed day, and no letter came from Carroll Tracey. What could his silence mean ? She grew hourly more and more anxious. One evening, when her father had gone to the club, and her aunt had been called from the room, Agatha took her box of letters in her lap, and opening one after another, read passages here and there, hoping to make the pain at her heart less.

‘Reading old letters ?’ said Aunt Hester, when she returned.

‘Yes, for the want of any new ones to read. Aunt Hester, do you think he can be on his way ? for I am sure he would not allow weeks to pass without writing to me if he were not, unless he is ill. I am getting so nervous that I do think I will send a telegram if the steamer does not bring me a letter this week. What do you think, Aunt Hester ?

‘I think you will soon hear from him. I would not

be in the least surprised to see him walk in at any moment. A man's patience will not hold out for ever, and I daresay he is on his way. But you would be very angry with him, and refuse to see him, would you not, if he were to come before the year was out ?'

'Angry with him ? I would be enchanted with him. I really did mean a year when I said so ; but there has not been one day in these ten that have passed since we came here that I have not wished that he would come this autumn. If he only would !'

Aunt Hester, who had remained standing, seemed to be watching the door nervously, and just as Agatha finished speaking it was opened by Stephano, their servant, who brought in a card.

As Agatha took it from the salver, she said, 'I gave you orders not to admit anyone.'

'It was my fault,' said Aunt Hester, disappearing from the room.

Agatha never knew what she had said to the servant which caused him to return and show the owner of the card into their sitting-room, for all was a blank to her from the instant in which her eyes fell upon the name to the moment in which she felt herself held in a speechless embrace in Carroll Tracey's arms, their very souls thrilling with the rapture of that long clinging kiss. Aunt Hester, who had received a letter from him of later date than those Agatha found awaiting her in Florence, had at once answered it, to his London address, that he might find it there upon landing, and know where to join them. She had been called out to see him before his entrance, and had returned to prepare the way for him. Now she had the good sense to leave them to the enjoyment of such hours of bliss as come only to those who, after sacrifices for

duty, are at last able to speak heart to heart, and soul to soul, without reservation, or fear of violating any of the laws of God or man. The fulness, the completeness of such love as had drawn them together rarely comes to mortals ; but in the immortal world may not all hope to be sharers in the wonderful revelations that are unfolded even here to those who love as did Agatha and Carroll Tracey ?—such love as those feel who know what it is to live moments in which they ‘ have no need of their perishable bodies, the spirits within standing face to face with each other, as purely spirit as in the eternal state.’

CONCLUSION.

THE following spring, when the cactus hedges were in bloom, and orange-groves gave out their rich draughts of sweetness, Agatha and Carroll Tracey were married at Naples, and went to Villa Belvidere at Sorrento to stay a month before going to Switzerland to join Mr. Lee and Aunt Hester.

‘If language cannot translate all that is seen and felt in the sky, the earth, and the air,’ by the ordinary travellers in Italy, what must those glorious, golden days, the witching brilliant nights of that enchanting clime, have brought to two hearts so sensitive to all impressions of beauty as were Agatha’s and her husband’s?

The Villa Belvidere stands some distance back from the bay, upon an acclivity in the lovely plain of Sorrento, surrounded by groves of orange and citron, laden with their golden fruit and creamy perfumed blossoms. Everywhere vines flourish and flowers bloom, the soft grey foliage of the olive tree harmonising with, yet toning down, the brighter hues. The branch of the Apennines whose hills cradle this charming plain, terminates at one end in a rocky cliff bordering the sea, while the other slopes gently down to the water’s edge. Everywhere nature, with prodigal hand, has spread scenes of majestic beauty and of picturesque grandeur. Rocky mountain gorges stretch upwards to wooded

heights, sparkling streams flash downwards to the sea, whose surface now flashes like a floor of glass, in dappled shades of purple, green, and crimson—now reflects only the deep blue vault above, and now soft shades of violet and orange blend like streams of liquid gold and amethysts. In the distance, Ischia and Procida lie wrapped in purple vapours; and nearer, Capri seems to drift like an enchanted isle. Vesuvius holds sullenly aloft over all her threatening torch, which no one can look upon without feeling moved by the terror of its mysterious source and fatal power.

Surrounded by all this indescribable beauty, Carroll and Agatha passed the days of their honeymoon. They often made excursions in the neighbourhood to Capri's blue grotto, and the ruins of the Villa of Tiberius; to Amalfi's bewitching shore, and to Salerno's magnificent amphitheatre of hills; to the desolate but imposing ruins of the majestic Greek temples of Paestum; and to the numerous little villages that nestle down, until they are all but lost in the brimming foliage of the 'piano di Sorrente,' as the natives call their little plain.

And so these halcyon days glided by, and their last evening at Sorrento came. They were sitting in the moonlight, on the square terrace (which commands such an unsurpassed view that the villa is known by the name of 'the paradise of Sorrento') in a silence more eloquent than speech; yet their inexpressible happiness tempered by the sadness that their approaching departure caused, from a spot which had enriched their lives with a world of intoxicating memories.

At last Agatha spoke.

'Carroll, I had the strangest fancy to-day. I am almost ashamed to tell you—you will think it such a wild

idea ; but you remember our walk in the lemon-grove at Massa. While I was waiting for you, when you went in with the peasant to buy some of his old coins, I kept on beyond the grove, into an open field, where there was a fountain with a stone seat beside it, at the end of an avenue of trees. I walked on, and sat down. Nothing but a vineyard lay between the fountain and a clump of ilex trees, where there stood in the shade the loveliest little peasant's cottage ; and while I was sitting there I saw a peasant girl—not such a one as we see every day around us, but such as are painted in pictures—come out with a stone jug in her hand and approach the fountain. As she came near I was struck by her wonderful resemblance to Sarah Atherton ; but in the same instant she saw me, and, turning suddenly, fairly flew back to the cottage.'

‘ Well, was there anything remarkable in that, my darling ? ’

‘ Yes, Carroll, it was remarkable ; because the woman had the form, the face, the very same brown rippling hair, with a golden gleam when the sun struck it, that Mrs. Atherton’s has. I was startled at the time by the resemblance, and the more I think of it the more I feel sure that it was she.’

‘ My darling, you ought to have told me of this sooner. We ought not to think of leaving Sorrento until we make sure that it was or was not Mrs. Atherton.’

‘ Oh no, do not let us turn her pursuers. When I think of all she has lost out of life, from not marrying one whom she loved—of all that she must have suffered in marrying one who was physically repulsive to her, I would think we were as cruel as if we were to give a hunted fawn into the hands of its pursuers. No, every-

one believes she is dead; let them continue to believe so; but I shall always think of her and the pretty peasant girl as of one and the same person.'

'If you are right, and I would not wonder if you are, who could have brought her here? Everyone comes to Sorrento; it is the last place in the world to hide in.'

'But everyone does not drive to Massa, and get out of the carriage to walk through its lemon-groves, and explore the country beyond, and sit down to rest by a fountain. Of course, if Mrs. Atherton is here, no one brought her; you know how well she speaks Italian.'

'Child! what a child you are, Agatha! If it is Mrs. Atherton, she is not living in this solitude without a lover. And who can he be? Mr. Jenkins, without doubt, I should say.'

'Oh no; he returned home, you know. Don't you remember that I told you I had received a letter from him, and how coolly he speculated upon the mystery of her disappearance.'

'Ah, the rascal! that was a blind, of course. He never went to America, my love. No, we will not turn detectives, but leave them to enjoy their stolen flowers and forbidden fruit as long as they can; the worm that never dies lies in the heart of those flowers, and the serpent's tooth still leaves its traces on such fruit. Ah, my darling, not in vain did we struggle through hours of passionate longing and dull despair; not in vain did we exercise that self-renunciation which duty required of us; our reward is in this ideal marriage, which unites us without leaving any memories of sin to corrode our lives.'

How fondly Carroll Tracey looked upon the saintly face, with its Madonna eyes, that was raised to his own in the streaming moonlight. He drew her head down

upon his breast, kissing with reverent tenderness the eyelids, as they closed in the fulness of her great joy, and whispering,

‘Our marriage, my adored Agatha, is not only for time, but for eternity.’

The next morning they left Sorrento. Upon their arrival in Lucerne they spoke only to Aunt Hester and Mr. Lee of Agatha’s adventure. Mr. Clawson, who was also at the Schweizerhof, told them that although he had no positive proof that Mrs. Atherton was living, he had suspicions that she had been aided, if not accompanied, by Mr. Jenkins in her departure.

‘If it had been a man with any other name than Jenkins,’ he said, with his usual frivolity, ‘I could have forgiven the elopement, for such I believe it to have been. A man with the name of Jenkins has no excuse for being a scoundrel. It is my name, Clawson, that has always kept me straight. There’s Frank Mortimer—I can’t spoil a story, Mr. Tracey, for relation’s sake—he has a name that would plead in his behalf, were *he* to elope. By the way, they say he is going to marry that charming little widow, Mrs. Arthur Grey. And Paul Howard—and Harold Graham—why, you see fellows with such names as those can’t escape with commonplace lives. If you want a man to have a romantic life, give him a romantic name; commonplace lives and commonplace names go together; that is my theory.’

‘What made you think of Paul Howard and Harold Graham in this connection?’ asked Agatha.

‘Why, it was quite natural, I think; Graham having shot himself when he heard of Mrs. Mortimer’s marriage. I beg your pardon Mr. Tracey, I had entirely forgotten; I had, indeed; you must excuse me. Let me see, what

was I saying? oh, that Paul Howard,—of course you have heard of his fate?’

‘No,’ answered Agatha; ‘neither had we heard that Mr. Graham was dead.’

‘I am not surprised, for it was kept very still. “Accidentally shot himself,” the newspapers said. I did not hear how it was myself until months after.’

‘But what about Paul Howard? has anything happened to him?’

‘I should think you had been residing in the moon, or rather at the south pole, inasmuch as the wise men say that we know more about the moon here than we do about the Antarctic circle. Why, the papers have been flooded, for a month now, with all sorts of versions of his duel with Matthews, whose wife’s *liaison* with Howard became so public that he challenged him; and the last accounts say that his wound has affected his brain, and that his friends have had to remove him to an asylum. Well, I believe in the old adage, “As you make your bed, so you must lie upon it.”’

This time, rumour had not exaggerated; all had happened as Mr. Clawson had stated. Before long the engagement of Mrs. Grey to Mr. Mortimer was authentically announced; but no one had any opportunity to feel surprised, as it had so frequently been announced before. Everyone agreed that it was a most suitable alliance, inasmuch as each had had so many love affairs that it could not be supposed that either possessed any advantages or disadvantages over the other.

When Agatha received a letter from her cousin, asking her to write to his *fiancée*, as such, she charitably said,

‘Poor little woman! After all, Carroll, she was more sinned against than sinning. Almost compelled by her

father to marry a man whom she felt no affection for, she fell in love with Frank ; but I must do her the justice to say that with all her flirtations I really believe she never loved anyone but him. Is it not strange how often men marry the very women who are the farthest removed from their ideals ? There is Mr. Marston, who never could find a wife good enough for him, taken in at last by a widow, whose history, if written, would introduce events in the lives of other men than her husband ; and now, here is Frank going to be married to the most incorrigible flirt of his acquaintance. I hope he is marrying her for love, and not for her wealth.'

'I am not ashamed to own that I married my wife for her wealth,' said Carroll Tracey, looking into Agatha's fond eyes.

'How can you say such words, even in jest ?' she asked.

'I am not in jest—they are the truest words I have ever spoken. I married my wife for her wealth of mind and soul ; and, more than all, for her wealth of love for me—such wealth, that there is not one hour of these sweet days in which I do not thank God for bestowing such a treasure upon me, begging Him that I may grow more worthy of the blessing which I possess—that blessing which even Solomon declares to be without price—beyond that of gold and rubies—a virtuous wife.'

Agatha's only answer was a kiss that she left upon his hair as she stooped ; and happy tears in her eyes that made them shine like brown diamonds, when their yellow hearts flash back the light. She stood, folding back with soft caresses the hair she had kissed, and when he drew her down, she, looking into his well-like eyes, said, 'I see only myself, Carroll ; your eyes are so full of me that I can see nothing else in them.'

‘You see my soul, Agatha ; it is my soul, and not my eyes that you are looking into when you see yourself. There is no room for any other there, for it is through my love for you that I have learned to love the Infinite one.’

His words were music to her ears—far sweeter strains than those that floated down to them from the old cathedral where the organ’s swelling notes were vibrating through the air, and the low chant of vesper hymns.

Agatha’s dream of Platonic love had ended for ever. She had found the friend she had longed for—with vague, shadowy longing—scarce knowing what she sought ; and in finding him she had learned that no one can sustain such ideal relations as she had dreamed of sustaining, outside of married life, without walking on dangerous ground, bordering precipices where one false step would plunge them both into an abyss in which no feet walk with souls unhaunted by remorseful memories and despairing thoughts.

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